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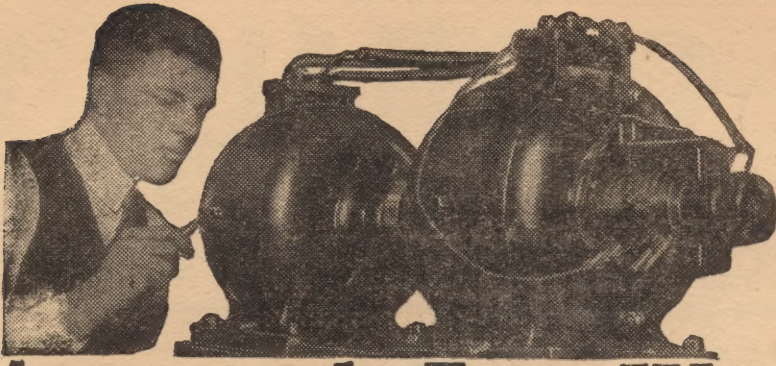
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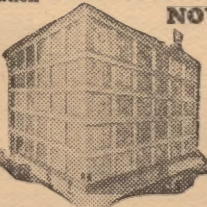
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SCOTLAND YARD



The International Detective Story Magazine



VOL. 4

APRIL, 1931

Whole No. 11

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WASHINGTON—A golden stream was leaking from the Treasury!

The Fingerprints That Lied (True Feature) **by Francisco José** 66

LONDON—The phantom strangler who baffled Scotland Yard.

Answered by Gats **by a Square Gambler** 73

EL PASO—It's wolf against wolf, when crime-rings fall out!

Grim House **by a Barrister** 83

NORTH ENGLAND—The roof was in the cellar—and murder prowled!

Leave it to the Doctor (Fact Series) **by Dr. Edward Podolsky** 93

Jungle Claws **by an ex-Crook** 94

MALAYSIA—The jungle has its own code of tooth and fang!

Gun Girl **by an Immigration Man** 104

OREGON—The North Woods were grand for a vacation—not!

The Broken Match (True Feature) **by James K. Martindale** 114

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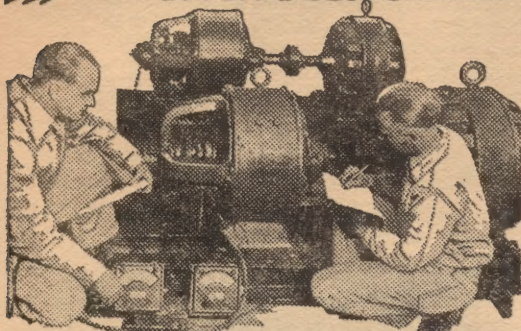
The Laboratory 124

Details of next month's prize contest; \$500 in gold!

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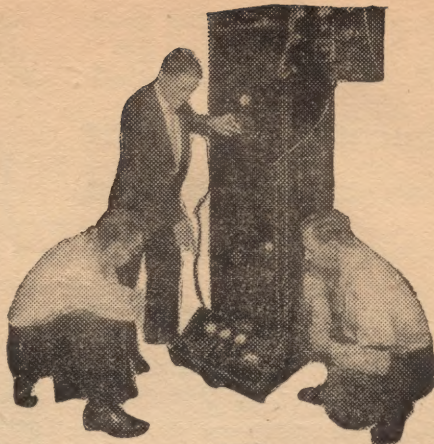
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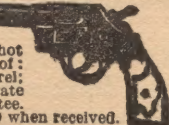
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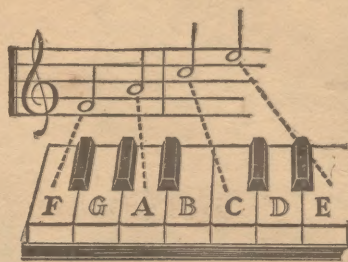
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ONE DAY

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THE stealthy shadows on the other side of the dark street stopped moving. There was a faint glitter of starlight on bared steel.

Ahead, the girl cried shrill warning:

"Father! Look out!"

Jerry Lang broke into a run. He'd been following the girl and her father

with what stealth he could—but he hadn't expected this!

His feet stumbled, slipped, plunged forward over cobbles slimy with the filth of ages.

A dark figure loomed in his path. Jerry's fist shot out and collided with a lean jaw. The man tumbled backward, howling curses in Arabic.

From the side another shadow moved in.

TO LIVE!



Jerry pivoted on his heel and drove a well-calculated left squarely into the middle of somebody's face. He felt a nose smash under his knuckles.

From the corner of his eye he caught that faint glitter again—and leaped backward just in time to avoid the sweep of a knife that would have disembowelled him.

His right hand had found his gun. Down came its barrel in a vicious crack on the neck of the stooping knife-wielder.

The man collapsed with a gurgling cry.

Jerry lifted the automatic and pulled the trigger—thrice.

Three cones of orange flame split open the fetid darkness beneath the over-

hanging lattices of harem windows. The ringing echoes of three shots sounded loud alarum in the Egyptian night.

Jerry caught a glimpse of white teeth snarling in brown faces, of turbaned heads, of feral eyes—

"*Imshi!*" he barked at them. "Scram—before this gat splashes the pack of you!"

Instantly the girl's father spoke out sturdily from the darkness, translating the threat into Arabic. For all his gray hairs, the Professor was not lacking in courage. His voice was steady, even chill with menace.

Somewhere a police whistle yipped in the night. Help was coming

Jerry waited, tense, finger on trigger—ready to shoot in deadly earnest.

One of the shadowy figures spoke in excellent English.

"It is not necessary to use Arabic, Professor Crane. Listen, if you value your life! You must leave Egypt. We've had enough of your kind here. A ship sails tomorrow for Brindisi. If you are here when she has gone, you die!"

The whistle sounded again, closer at hand. Heavy boots clattered over stones, approaching on the run.

Jerry became suddenly aware that Selma Crane stood at his elbow, breathing rapidly.

"The police!" she muttered. "Your shots brought help—that's why they didn't rush—cowards—"

"Remember!" warned again the cold voice of the Unknown. "Remember, Crane! It is death for you to be in Egypt when tomorrow's sun goes down!"

He added a command in his own tongue. Jerry vaguely sensed that the rascals were picking up the fallen. Then they were gone, fading into the farther shadows of the street just as the darkness was lanced by the rays of police flashlights.

"Allah!" exclaimed the inspector who led the patrol.

The police of Alexandria are accustomed to strange sights, but no stranger spectacle had ever confronted them than the one now illumined by their torches.

In the center of the street, feet sturdily apart and gun in hand, stood Jerry Lang, dominating the whole scene. He was clad in well-cut blue serge after the latest Broadway fashion; but his square shoulders, the grim set of his jaw and the hard gleam of his eyes warned all beholders that here was no playboy. Even in New York he would have been noticeable. In the Arab quarter of Alexandria he was a figure at once heroic and bizarre.

Behind him, at the mouth of the reeking alley, stood the old professor, Stanley Crane, slender, frail-looking, gray of hair. His daughter, Selma, crisp in white linen and spotless Panama, was at Jerry's side.

The street beyond was empty. The assassins, sound and halt, had made good their escape.

"Who fired those shots?" the police-inspector demanded.

Jerry relaxed. He grinned at his inquisitor, inspecting his red fez, his smart tight-fitting blue uniform, his gold-laced sleeves in the weird glare of a flashlight.

"Looks like the captain of a Shriner patrol!" thought Jerry.

He did not answer the question; he waited for the professor to do that.

"We were attacked by footpads," the professor stated calmly. "Luckily, they heard you coming and ran away."

No more than that—and quite truthful, as far as it went.

"So! Eet ees vairy dangerous for foreigner to go into Arab quarter aftair dark," the police-officer said. "Please to come weet' me. I escort you back to your 'otel, w'ere I weel tak' your names for my report. Please."

SURROUNDED by police, the three Americans were escorted out of the twisting, narrow, unlighted by-ways of the Arab quarter into wider and brighter thoroughfares.

It was not until they had reached the glare and glitter of the Place Mehemet Ali with its crowded sidewalks, its rushing motors, its metropolitan roar of noise, that Selma Crane spoke.

"Mr. Lang!" She was looking up at Jerry, her dark eyes a little wider open than usual with surprise. Or—fear. "Aren't you Mr. Lang? Surely I've seen you at the hotel?"

Jerry nodded. His observation of the Cranes had been from a distance. He'd decided the girl was not the sort to be drawn into a casual conversation with a stranger, even under the relaxed conventions of Americans abroad. But she was all interest now. Maybe he could get her talking.

"Why—why, how wonderful that you should have turned up just at the right moment!" she cried. "But—how odd! Do you usually select the Arab quarter for your evening strolls about Alexandria?"

Jerry took his time about answering.

This wasn't his country. Already the insidious influence of the East was making itself felt. Past them as they walked briskly along behind the professor and the police-officer, surged the colorful river of Alexandrian night-life.

The Egyptian men themselves were not unusual types—no darker on the average than a sun-tanned American, and notable only for the universal fez. But the others—

Here were two huge Sudanese, lumbering along with their bloodshot eyes rolling in wonder from side to side; here a group of chattering Greek sailors, gay of dress and careless of glance as they ogled a couple of girls in the eternal black cloaks of lower-class Egyptian women.

Two red-faced British Tommies swung past. A hooded Arab, wrapped in his burnous, flashed a glance of hatred at the "oppressors of Islam."

A raucous voice bade all and sundry, "Come een—right eenside, see the famous dancing-girls—gen-yoo-wine Ghawazi from the *grrreat* desert. Come een, soldier!" And everywhere, underfoot and all about, darted the ubiquitous Egyptian small boys, dozens of them, every one on commerce bent, making the night hideous with their shrill cries: "Boots-I-shine!" — "Eggs-I-cook" — "Oran-jez!"

It was all strange—all foreign. This was the East, the Orient. And its guile was a different thing from the trickeries of New York. Strange things—things utterly impossible to America could happen here.

Yet Jerry was not dismayed. The Orient is the home of lies, of indirection, but five years of experience with one of the greatest of New York detective agencies had taught him that the plain truth is frequently a most effective weapon.

"It wasn't so wonderful, or odd either, Miss Crane," he answered the girl's remark. "I followed you."

Jerry had the feeling that the girl caught herself just in time to prevent a start of alarm. He was sure that the added chill in her voice was pure camou-

flage as she uttered the inevitable question:

"And why, may I ask?"

Enough plain truth for a while, reflected Jerry.

"Saw you and your dad going that way," he answered, "and tailed along because I thought there might be a jam of some sort. I'm just a tourist here, but I'd been told the north part of town was a tough neighborhood." He grinned suddenly, boyishly.

Selma relaxed a trifle.

"We were fools to go there," she admitted "and it was very kind and thoughtful of you to follow us. Thank you ever and ever so much, Mr. Lang!"

Her hand lay lightly on his arm for a moment as she spoke. They were passing the brilliantly lighted front of the Abbas Hilmi Theatre at the instant. Jerry looked down at his companion with interested eyes.

She was a lovely girl—with dark skin and hair, a thin oval face, delicately carved features and a sensitive mouth. Her great eyes, slanting ever so little upward at the outer corners, gave her face a decidedly mischievous and intriguing expression when she smiled, an effect which was enhanced by an oddly placed dimple beneath her right eye. Yet there was nothing fluffy about Selma Crane. There was, in fact, an excellent brain behind those eyes—a brain so well-trained that she was her father's chief aide in his scientific researches, and shared with him the tired lines of overwork and eye-strain.

Jerry Lang knew this. For three days he had done little else but observe the Cranes, father and daughter. He had made such quiet inquiries as he dared without arousing suspicion. But he had been utterly unable to penetrate beyond generalities. Watchful waiting was getting him nowhere with the Cranes. Their sudden clandestine visit to the Arab quarter had promised much and yielded little in the way of information.

His next words were sudden, unexpectedly crisp.

"Will your father leave tomorrow?"

"Never!" flashed Selma. "He has work to do here on which he's set his

heart. He—we're not afraid of threats!"

The real Yank spirit, that!

"How'd it happen your father took you with him into that back alley to-night?" pursued Jerry. "Tough place for a girl. He ought to've had more sense."

"A note—he received a note, brought to the hotel by an Arab boy," was the prompt reply. "Something about a statuette of Nofretate, the 'wondrous queen' of the Pharaoh Ikhnaton, you know—" She glanced up inquiringly and Jerry nodded, though he had never heard of either Ikhnaton or the lady—"a priceless thing if it really existed. I was afraid. There are many Egyptians who hate the very idea of their ancient tombs being excavated and explored by foreigners, and that's what father's here for. There have been murderous attacks on foreign scientists before. But father was all excited over the supposed statuette. There was no holding him back, so of course I went with him—and it was a trap. Then you came. That's all."

THE Professor, walking ahead with the inspector, had stopped to await them under the hotel's sidewalk canopy. They all entered the foyer in a group.

The hotel manager, alarmed by the sight of the police uniform, came hurrying forward. Behind him waddled a fat little man wearing a loud checked suit and cloth-top shoes—a man at whom Jerry Lang stared in astonishment.

"When did you get here?" he grunted half-disgustedly.

The fat man rubbed his hands together nervously. His little eyes were twinkling with suspicion and ill-suppressed excitement. He pawed at Jerry's coat-sleeve, drawing him aside while the professor and his daughter were giving their information to the police officer.

"I am in Alexandria not more than an hour," he spluttered. "Came on the *Ortona*. The rug—you have news of it, eh?"

"Not me," denied Jerry. "A hunch, maybe; but nothing definite."

"Ai! It is ruin, then! Fifty thousand dollars, gone! Like that!"

"You've got your insurance, Mr. Charken," Jerry reminded him rather coldly. "What did you have to come over from New York for, anyway? You'll only make it harder for me to keep under cover."

"Fifty thousand dollars is enough money to need my personal attention," grumbled Charken. "I don't trust nobody with fifty thousand dollars. Ai! That swine Benjamin! And to think how I treated him like my own brother! Ai! If I hadn't——"

"You staying here?" Jerry cut in.

"Not me! I'm taking a house—furnished place, with servants 'n all. Friend o' mine in N'Yawk fixed it so's I could have it. I'm leary o' stayin' at the hotel."

"Why?"

"That Benjamin," muttered Charken, lowering his voice. "He's a devil, that feller! He's got friends here, maybe even in the police. I'm safer in a house."

"You'd 'a' been safer yet if you stayed in New York," Jerry remarked. "I don't see yet why you had to come tagging over here. My firm's been retained by your surety company to get the rug back. If we don't get it, the surety company'll pay your loss, or most of it. They're on the bond of your missing manager—and they're good for the dough."

Jerry was sore, good and sore. Here he was on his first foreign assignment, working like blazes to make good—to keep up the record that had placed him in the front rank of the Reddington Agency's operatives—and this grease-ball had to come hornin' in, putting the finger on him for the benefit of every crook in Alexandria.

Worrying about his lousy money—couldn't sit at home and give a guy a chance. Damned fool!

Jerry Lang was in Alexandria looking for a man and for a rug—a rug on which Leo Charken, Oriental Importer, placed an astonishing value. The rug had vanished from the Charken warehouse between two days, and its disappearance exactly coincided with that of one Rufus Benjamin, Charken's manager.

All of which might have come under the general heading of "just too bad" if it hadn't been that the Mammoth Fidelity and Surety Company had issued a surety bond on Brother Benjamin for the exact sum of fifty thousand dollars!

The Mammoth, like most surety companies, didn't care about having its principals go sour on it and was willing to spend money liberally to pursue such erring brethren to the ends of the earth, both for the chastisement of the erring and the recovery of stolen property.

Hence Jerry Lang's presence in Alexandria, to which city he had painstakingly traced Benjamin's movements, only to lose all sign of him utterly from the moment the fellow had walked down the gangplank of a P. & O. liner, passed through the customs shed, and vanished in the Oriental whirlpool that is Alexandria.

Jerry'd been in Alexandria for two weeks—a week behind Benjamin—working carefully, keeping his purposes to himself, hoping for a break.

Three days ago he'd chanced on something, the first faint far glimmer of a clue. And now this blundering fool of a Charken had shown up. A big help he'd be!

Jerry swore grimly between his teeth.

The professor, finished with the police officer, was coming toward him, hand outstretched.

"I haven't had an opportunity to thank you, Mr. Lang," he began, then broke off suddenly on a sharp exclamation of surprise. "Why, Mr. Charken! Whatever brings you to Egypt?"

Jerry looked at him with quick interest. Decidedly, the plot was thickening.

Jerry, of course, had been provided with photographs not only of Benjamin, but of the stolen rug. And three days ago, walking quietly into the smoking-room of the hotel, he had come upon the Professor, asleep in a leather chair, with a photograph of the very rug in question lying face up on his knees!

Jerry had hardly had time to make sure of this, when Selma Crane, hurrying in, had awakened her father, berated him soundly for his carelessness, and

hustled the photograph back into its portfolio and the Professor off to their suite.

Since then the Cranes had made no move unwatched by Jerry.

CHARKEN was volubly explaining his reasons for coming to Egypt—and the professor was listening with growing excitement.

"The rug has been stolen, you say? Stolen?" he broke in on Charken's chatter.

"Oh, yes! Very funny thing, too—" Charken hesitated, glanced at Jerry, and lifted a hand to his mouth as though just realizing *how* funny. "Ver-y funny thing. The Professor I met only about a week before this rug was stolen. He comes to the warehouse askin' about the very rug itself—offers me a century to let him photograph it. I did—sure thing. Why not? Don't cost me nothing to let him take pictures. And a century's a century. He takes his pictures, he goes away, and a week later the rug's swiped! Hah—" he paused, staring at the Professor.

Jerry Lang was beginning to fear the excitable Charken would let his identity out of the bag.

Selma Crane saved the situation for the moment. She came hurrying up to her father, with almost motherly anxiety:

"You must be awfully tired, father, and upset too. Bed's the place for you. Come along!"

The Professor scowled, for all the world like an unwilling urchin.

"I'm not in the mood to retire, Selma," he protested. "You know I can't sleep when I go to bed so early. And besides——"

"You mean you miss your hour in your deck-chair alone with your cigar and your thoughts, staring at the stars!" Selma interrupted. "At home or at sea he has always been the same, Mr. Lang, ever since I was a little girl. That hour before bedtime was his sacred custom, his own time when nobody might disturb him. When he can't have it he's a regular old grump!"

"Trying to be alone in a modern hotel is a tough job, Miss Crane, in New

or Alexandria or anywhere else." Jerry's calm tone masked heartfelt relief. "Miss Crane, this is Mr. Charken—an acquaintance from New York."

Maybe Charken would take that hint!

"A pleasure to meet such a pretty lady!" said Charken blandly, holding her hand a thought too long in his own dirty paw.

Jerry saw Selma's eyes narrow with suspicion, saw her shoot one swift glance at her father.

"Charken!" she said softly. "Not the Mr. Charken who owns the rug, father?"

"The very same!" exclaimed the Professor. "Selma, will you kindly pay a little attention to what I am trying to tell you? The rug's been stolen!"

"Stolen!" Selma turned pale. "Why, I——"

"Yes, stolen!" the professor went right on. "Mr. Charken has traced it to Egypt. He's here to try to recover it if he can!"

"And he knows Mr. Lang!" Selma cut in. "Now isn't that funny?"

Her eyes, steel-hard with renewed suspicion, were fixed on Jerry's face.

This Jane was smart—too blamed smart!

There was a stir of sudden movement in the vestibule.

Turning from Selma's accusing gaze, Jerry glimpsed a flash of metal in the hand of a tall man, shrouded in a Bedouin burnous and haik—a hand that jerked forward just before its owner ducked through the street door.

Something wished across the lobby—

Jerry flung himself in front of Selma Crane. Something struck his outflung arm, something that stung cruelly before it fell clattering to the tiled floor.

Charken squawked in terror.

Jerry was already bounding toward the door, shouting to the bemedalled porter:

"Stop that man! Stop him!"

But when he reached the doorway the fellow was gone, swallowed up in the crowd.

The porter shrugged his shoulders:

"Impossible to stop him, *effendi*. He was here, he was gone. Like a flash. A

Bedawi from the desert, *effendi*. They are a tricky people."

Jerry could feel the warm blood running down his arm. His dominant thought was to avoid attracting too much attention.

He shouldered aside the solicitous Levantine manager and a couple of reception clerks, bidding them curtly to mind their own business.

Then Selma Lang stood before him.

"Again I have to thank you, Mr. Lang," she said, her face a mask of suppressed emotion. "I—I don't understand why——"

She held something in her hand.

Jerry interrupted: "The music-room. There, through that doorway. Come along, Professor. You, too, Charken!"

The music-room, fortunately, proved entirely deserted.

Jerry touched the girl's hand.

"Suppose you let me have a look at that," he said.

"Not till I've seen your arm!" Selma replied firmly.

Blood was dripping from his fingertips as he took off his light coat and rolled up his shirt-sleeves. But the wound on his right forearm was only a free-bleeding scratch.

With his handkerchief torn into strips, she made a neat and workmanlike job of bandaging the injury. The Professor and Charken stood by in ill-hidden impatience.

Then at last she let them look at the thing she had picked up from the lobby floor.

It was a dagger. Not a dangerous weapon, but a thin-bladed, ivory-handled, dainty little affair, just heavy enough for throwing.

"No wonder it didn't hurt me much," grinned Jerry. "But what's the note?"

A strip of paper was tied round the handle of the dagger by a thread.

Jerry, who made a point of having his pockets full of useful gadgets, produced a penknife, cut the thread, and spread out the thin rice paper on the glistening top of a grand piano.

Its message was brief, printed in English with the precision of the caption of a mechanical drawing.

"Professor Crane: Had we wished it, you would now be dead. Sunset tomorrow—Remember."

"Ai—ai!" wailed Charken, pale with fear.

"Father!"

Selma's voice held an appeal her pride would not let her voice. The writer of that note was evidently a man to be reckoned with.

Jerry Lang had become thoroughly convinced that the Cranes either had had something to do with the theft of the rug, or knew where it was now. This business of knives and threats looked remarkably like a falling out between thieves. If Crane stayed on at the hotel, he'd probably get bumped off—leaving the puzzle no clearer.

The solution flashed to him—the perfect plan, by which he could at the same time keep an eye on the Cranes, guard the Professor from a murderous knife, and lay a trap for Benjamin.

"This is no joke, Professor," he said curtly. "They're putting you on the spot! Going to stick it out?"

"Certainly!" snapped the Professor. "I've been threatened before, and I'm still alive!"

"But, father!" exclaimed the girl. "You saw how that knife-thrower came in and got away again. It isn't safe here in the hotel. It *isn't*, father!"

"Then where shall we go? Out into the street?" asked the Professor, with heavy sarcasm.

They had said precisely what Jerry wanted them to say.

"I've got an idea, Professor," he observed calmly. "Mr. Charken, here, is taking a furnished house for his stay in Alexandria. With trustworthy servants, you'd be a lot safer there than in a hotel. Guards can be hired: strangers can be kept out, or watched. It's a good bet."

"What—" began the astonished Charken.

Jerry's boot-heel cracked him on the shin.

"I know Mr. Charken pretty well, and I'm sure he'll agree with me," remarked the detective.

But the scowl of frightened objection

was deepening between Charken's eyes. The fool was afraid!

"I don't—" Charken was beginning his refusal.

"Professor Crane. Call-ing Professor C-r-r-r-ane."

A page stood at the music-room door, with a formidable-looking envelope on a salver. The Professor and Selma both started forward anxiously.

Jerry took advantage of the opportunity for a swift whisper in Charken's ear:

"Charken, you've got to help me out. It's our one chance to make Benjamin show his hand."

"And this Professor, he should be killed in my house? The police should come maybe and blame me, or maybe we should all be killed?" chattered Charken. "No! I won't have anything to do with it!" He shook his head stubbornly.

There was time for no more insistence; the Professor was turning toward them again.

"What is it, father? What is it?"

Selma's voice was low, but quivered with anxiety. She was clinging to her father's arm as he tore open the envelope and extracted its contents—crackling sheets of white paper.

"Nothing to worry about!" the Professor exclaimed. "Good news. It's my excavation permit."

"Already?" cried Selma. "Oh, Father! That's wonderful!"

"Yes! I didn't expect it for another week," said the Professor. "My friend Marmaduke at the Egyptian Museum rushed it through for me. Here's a note from him wishing me luck. Why, Selma, we can start right in tomorrow morning!"

Jerry knew that the excavations for the purpose of investigating Egyptian tombs and other relics of antiquity were strictly controlled by the Egyptian Government. The Cranes had been waiting for their permit, which explained their inactivity for the past weeks.

Where did the missing rug fit into all this? It *must* fit in somewhere—yet what could a rug have to do with excavations?

"And now," went on the Professor,

"what was that you were so kindly suggesting, Mr. Lang, about a change of residence?"

Jerry had no intention of apologizing for that coward of a Charken. He turned toward the little man with a sour smile:

"You heard me, Mr. Charken. Don't you think it's a good idea?"

To the detective's surprise Charken nodded almost eagerly.

"A very good one indeed!" he spluttered, rubbing his hands together nervously. "My poor house will be honored if the lovely lady and the distinguished Professor Crane will consent to spend a few days beneath its roof!"

He sounded like a floorwalker addressing Mrs. Astorbilt, thought Jerry sardonically. What had made the beggar change his mind? He'd been all set against the idea a moment before; scared stiff at the very thought of it. And now——

"You will so honor me, Professor? And you, Miss Crane?" Charken was actually begging them.

"I hardly know what to say," hesitated the Professor. "It is very kind of you, Mr. Charken—ah——"

It was Selma who made the domestic decisions for the Crane family.

"When those devils find out your permit has been granted, Father, they won't wait for tomorrow!" she cut in. "And they'll find it out—they have ways. Your life isn't safe another hour in this hotel. Mr. Charken, we'll be glad to accept your offer, and thankful, too. Of course Mr. Lang will come with us?"

"Of course!" said Charken.

Was the girl so suspicious of Jerry that she wanted him close at hand where she could watch him—or was she beginning to depend on him?

"We must go to the house right away, if Miss Crane is right," Charken declared. "But you will need a little time to get your things together. Me, I must send a messenger to the house with orders to have rooms prepared, also I must have the butler send a reliable cabman here to the hotel. Maybe if we are careful, they won't find you for three-four days, Professor."

They will if he starts excavating tomorrow, reflected Jerry. But let tomorrow take care of itself.

"Suppose we all meet here in half-an-hour," he suggested. "Professor, I'll stand by while you're doing your packing, if you don't mind. We can't have anything go wrong at the last moment."

Selma gave him a grateful glance.

"See you later, Charken," Jerry nodded.

"Positively!" agreed Charken. "Who could be lending me a pencil to write my message?"

"I can." Jerry fished in his coat pocket and produced a handful of miscellany—keys, a stub of crayon, string, a pocket-rule, and at last a short pencil. "Here you are."

He caught Selma's amused glance at his collection as he stuffed it back into his pockets.

"You never can tell when you'll need some little gadget," he told her, grinning.

They moved toward the door, leaving Charken to scribble his message on a leaf from his note-book.

CHAPTER II

EYES OF DOOM



JERRY LANG spent an active thirty minutes. The Cranes must pack. He must pack. He had telephoning to do. There were arrangements to be made for paying the hotel bills without ostentation, and for conveying the baggage quietly to a side door instead of parading it through the lobby. And during all this he could hardly bring himself for one moment to let Professor Crane out of his sight.

It was a hectic half-hour, but promptly on the dot, Selma, Jerry and the Professor, attired just as they had been before and carrying not so much as a hand-bag, strolled into the music-room.

Charken kept them waiting five minutes. Then he scuttled in, his face beaded with sweat.

"Ready? You are all ready?" he de-

manded, surprised at the absence of luggage.

"Quite," the Professor assured him.

"Ask your carriage-man to drive into the alley—to the east door," Jerry directed. "We'll meet you there."

They did; and their hand-baggage was piled into the carriage by well-bribed hotel servants with remarkable silence and expedition. These secret affairs are handled well in Egypt; every infant is a born conspirator.

In no time at all they were rattling away over the stones of the alley, through the Rue Ibrahim Pasha and then out along the Rue Tewfik Pasha toward the Boulevard de Rosette, avoiding the glare of the Place Mehemet Ali by a detour of several blocks.

The streets here were well lighted, but if they had been seen and followed from any corner—from any window—might come the deadly report, the spurt of flame.

Looking back nervously, Charken broke the anxious silence:

"That carriage is following us!"

A two-horsed cab, smartly driven, was indeed right behind them, keeping pace but making no effort to draw ahead.

Selma Crane placed a protecting arm about her father.

They crossed the Boulevard de Rosette and entered a narrower street whose lights were spaced farther apart. A right turn—a left turn—across a little cobbled square decorated with a single anemic palm-tree—then they plunged into a narrow thoroughfare walled close on either hand by the blank white facades of houses, windowless on the first floor and built flush with the street. There were few passersby to mark their progress, but the other carriage still followed.

They drew up in front of one of those uninviting white houses.

"This is the place," Charken said.

"Nice quiet spot for a murder!" Jerry muttered as the little man scrambled out and invited the others to alight.

The second carriage drew up right behind them, and two men jumped out, tall grim figures in the flickering light of the distant street lamp.

Charken ran to the door. He clattered madly on the little postern that pierced the heavier main gate—the only opening in the blank white wall.

It opened instantly, a fan of yellow light sifting out over the cobblestones. A native servant in spotless white bowed low.

"Enter, *effendi*. Enter! The porter shall see to your bags."

Charken darted inside.

Jerry hustled the others into the house and saw the baggage on the way after them in the hands of bare-footed fellaheen servants.

From the size of the main doorway, Jerry expected to find himself in the usual entrance to an Egyptian house—an arched passageway leading into a courtyard, from which the various rooms could be reached by means of separate doors, and the second story by a gallery.

Instead, here was a high roofed hall, brilliantly lighted by chandeliers blazing high amid the ornamental stucco work of its Moorish arches. Between the pilasters supporting these arches, there were on either side of the hall four curtained doorways. At the rear, a magnificent staircase, guarded by two life-size figures beautifully done in bronze, swept up and lost itself in shadow, curving out on either side to meet the galleries of the second floor.

Toward this staircase the servants were already carrying the bags; the white-clad butler was bowing again to Charken.

Selma Crane and her father stood at one side, staring at the two tall men who had followed Jerry Lang into the hall. Magnificent specimens of black manhood were these, neatly clad in well-scrubbed khaki shorts and jackets, with cummerbunds of some dark material and bright red fezzes which still showed little worn patches in front where regimental badges once had been. They were unarmed, save that each carried a stout cudgel some three feet long.

"They're as alike as two peas!" laughed Selma. "When I heard you telephoning, Mr. Lang, I didn't suppose you'd do as well as this!"

"Who are these men?" demanded

Charken, pawing at Jerry's sleeve excitedly.

"Sudanese," Jerry explained. "Ex-soldiers of the Sudan Defense Force. I hired 'em—or rather, I phoned the American consul and he hired 'em for me."

"Who's paying them?" Charken wanted to know. "I got no money to pay soldiers!"

"I'll attend to that," Jerry replied. "Hey, you—bring those bags over here."

He opened his own Gladstone and produced a pair of Colt automatics, at sight of which the eyes of the Sudanese glistened.

"I always carry a coupla spare guns," he explained to Selma. "You never know what's going to happen. Things like guns and string and pencils always come in handy."

He extended the guns to the Sudanese.

"You savvy how to work 'em?"

"Yaas, *effendi*. Plenty we savvy," one of the blacks answered, with a broad grin.

"All right. You two are on guard now. Stick close to me till I tell you different."

"Yaas, *effendi*."

At the word "guard" the two Sudanese had straightened up smartly and assumed a vigilant air. Both, Jerry noted, wore a bit of blue-and-gold ribbon on the left breasts of their blouses.

"What's that?" he asked.

"The Sudan Medal, granted only for acts of great gallantry," the Professor stated before the Sudanese could answer.

Jerry nodded with satisfaction. These men would not fail him.

Charken had been talking to the butler. Now he came trotting over, trying in his ludicrous way to play the genial host.

"All the rooms are ready. Professor, I am happy to tell you you can have your hour with the—hah—stars, as your charming daughter describes it. We have a garden behind the house where you can be alone. Is it not nice, eh?"

The Professor perked up noticeably.

"Excellent, excellent!"

"We'll go to our rooms, first, Selma

put in, "if you don't mind, Mr. Charken. Afterwards——"

"Afterwards you could join me in the salon?" begged Charken. "It is to the left of the stairway, there. The butler tells me we have a small repast, a little wine."

"Excellent!" said the Professor again.

Jerry agreed with him. This would afford just the opportunity he needed for a private chat with Charken. The Sudanese could guard the Professor. Jerry bade them attend the old man to his rooms.

Father and daughter set off up the staircase, guided by a servant and followed by the two tall blacks.

Jerry noticed that as the Sudanese passed the two bronze figures at the foot of the stair, they shrank together as though for mutual protection, giving the figures a wide berth. He also perceived that the figures, though having the bodies of men, bore the heads of hawks, with savage-looking outthrust beaks. A queer idea. . . .

"COME on, Charken," Jerry urged. "What about that wine? This Egyptian dust gets into a man's throat."

Passing to the left of the staircase, the butler bowed them to a doorway giving access to an ornate room much smaller than the great hall, and lavishly decorated and furnished. In the rear wall of this room, opposite the doorway, a French window stood wide open; through it the stirring breeze of evening wafted a scent of exotic flowers.

"That's the garden, is it?"

Jerry walked to the French window and looked out. The garden seemed a safe spot enough. Even in the pale starlight, he could see a high wall surrounding it on three sides, the house making the fourth. With one of the Sudanese on the wall and the other at this French window, the old man would be O.K.

He swung back to the pudgy importer.

"Now see here, Mr. Charken, you've got to cover me up. So far these folks think I'm just a chance friend that's trying to do 'em a good turn. They haven't made me as a dickat all. But the girl's

sharp as a razor. Watch your step; no breaks."

"I'll be careful," Charken promised. "I'm just as anxious as you are to get back my rug. You think maybe the professor had something to do with it, eh?"

"Don't you?"

"Sure. What else? He hired this low-life Benjamin to steal it," Charken nodded sagely. "Now Benjamin don't want to split up with him, so Benjamin tries to kill him, hah?"

"As good a guess as any," Jerry agreed. "Pipe down. Here they come."

It was Selma alone. As Charken poured a glass of wine for her, she drew Jerry aside.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Lang—afraid of this house!" she whispered. "I'm not a fanciful girl, and I'm not easily frightened; but there is something in the air of this place that makes me weak and sick all over. I've a feeling that there are eyes behind every one of those curtains out in the big hall, eyes behind every door, eyes behind all these rustling hangings: eyes everywhere, watching, gloating, hating——"

The girl was almost hysterical; shaken out of her usual poise, trembling as she clung to his arm.

"This place is old—old!" she went on rapidly. "It belongs to the old Egypt that hates us all—those horrible figures in the hall are ancient gods. And—eeeeeeeeeh!"

Her shriek rang through the house, echoing almost mockingly from arch and column.

Jerry's glance followed her quivering finger. The farther wall of the salon was decorated with a huge representation of a twining serpent, done in bright paints with every attention to detail—scales, fangs, darting tongue, eyes——

"It looked at me!" wailed Selma. "It's eyes—burning eyes—staring at me!"

Jerry saw nothing unusual about the snake's eyes. But Selma's agitation was contagious.

Charken's trembling hand dropped the wine-glass, which shattered on the teakwood table. His face was a sickly

white, like the belly of a dead fish.

"That damn snake!" he muttered. "I don't like to look at him!"

"It is intended to portray the serpent Mersegret," observed the precise voice of the Professor, who entered at that moment with the two Sudanese at his heels. "An excellent piece of reproduction; you can see the original at Thebes. Mersegret, you know, was a form which the goddess Hathor was supposed to assume to guard the desert tombs."

Somehow his scholarly detachment was steadying. Selma summoned up the pale ghost of her merry smile. Charken found his hand steady enough to pour more wine.

Jerry noted, however, that the two Sudanese were extremely ill at ease.

"This very bad house, *effendi*," one of them muttered to him. "Yaas, *effendi*—better you go quick from this house. Devils here."

There was a slight clink. Jerry turned quickly. It was only one of the silent-footed servants with tray and glass. Yet the man's very impassivity seemed hostile, derisive. Jerry drained his glass and accepted a sandwich. Eating and drinking were concrete, everyday actions that were oddly reassuring.

"Now for the garden!" exclaimed the Professor. "I'm dog-tired, Selma, but I want my hour with the stars."

"This way, Professor," Jerry said. "Right through the French window. I've told one of the Sudanese to get up on the wall. I'll station the other at the French window. Mind if I walk out with you?"

"Not at all, not at all," murmured the Professor. "Selma, my dear, you'd best go to bed. You've had a trying evening. Good night."

"Good night, father," said Selma, dutifully, and kissed him.

With Jerry close behind, the Professor stepped out into the scented night.

Together they made a circuit of the garden. It was a small space, not more than a hundred feet square, with flower-beds and rose-bushes arranged in formal patterns. The wall was some twelve feet high, and could be scaled only by

means of a ladder—which Jerry removed after his Sudanese sentry had ascended to the flat top of the wall and begun quietly pacing round its circuit. There was no gate, no stair, no tower—just the sheer white wall, plastered and smooth. There was no entrance from the house, either, save the French window leading to the salon.

The windows of the second story overlooked the garden, but they were in plain sight of the Sudanese on the terrace next the house, who could watch them and the French window at the same time.

"You're as safe here as you'd be in a prison-yard back home," Jerry grinned. "Where you may find yourself before we're through," he added to himself.

Too bad. He was beginning to like the old Prof. But a case was a case.

The Professor muttered assent. He was interested in the fountain which occupied the center of the garden. It was dry, now, but the old man wanted to examine the statue in its center and was annoyed because the starlight didn't enable him to do so.

"I'll be back here in the morning," he said. "Charken told me the butler had found a chair for me. Ah—there it is, among the rose-bushes. Ahhhh!"

Jerry took his cue.

"Good night, Professor."

"Good night, Mr. Lang. You have been very kind to take so much trouble for strangers," the old man answered.

"Glad to do it," Jerry nodded.

The Professor moved toward the chair. Jerry turned and walked quickly back toward the house. He glanced upward and saw a moving shadow atop the wall—his Sudanese. The other was alert at the French window.

"All well, *effendi*," he muttered as Jerry passed.

It was good business to have these brave fellows at hand.

Selma Crane still lingered in the salon. So did Charken, crouching and trembling on a gilt chair and pouring himself glass after glass of the potent Cyprian wine.

"Father's all right?" Selma asked anxiously.

"Sure. Snug in his chair—and well guarded," Jerry told her. You'd better

run along to bed. I'm not turning in till I've seen him safe upstairs, with a guard at his door and one under his window."

"You're a darling, Jerry Lang!" cried Selma impulsively. "I wouldn't stay in this house a minute if it wasn't for you. Why, all this Moorish stucco and Arab ornamentation is just camouflage. It's broken in places, and I'll swear that some of the stone-work underneath was old in Cleopatra's day. There's something sinister, something horrible about this old house. Oh, well, I won't be able to sleep if I keep on working myself up. Nerves, that's all. Good night!"

She held out her hand; Jerry took it. Her fingers were cold as ice—cold as death. They seemed to cling to his for a moment with the grasp of a frightened child. Then they loosened and Selma was gone, almost before Jerry had time to answer her good-night.

HE LISTENED to the *click-click* of her smart little heels ascending that ancient staircase until the sound died away, snuffed out by the crushing loneliness that succeeded it. And for an instant a curious expression lingered on his strong, young face.

Charken, muttering to himself in a maudlin fit of shakes, was no company. He was drinking to drown his fears and when Jerry spoke to him he didn't answer.

Jerry had only to step to the French window to talk to the Sudanese soldier, but he hesitated to do that lest he disturb the Professor.

The salon was almost gloomy now. The servants had extinguished all the lights save one or two in the great chandelier.

Jerry paced the floor. The heavy pile rug deadened his footfalls, seeming like everything else in the place to be in league against the intruder, to deny him even the company of a homely and familiar sound.

He glanced at his wrist-watch. The luminous dial told him that the Professor had been in the garden just ten minutes.

Fifty minutes more. The Professor was punctual, Selma had said: he'd come in right on the stroke of his hour.

Jerry strove to interest himself in the painted snake on the wall next the French window. So distinctly did its blending colors stand out that in this dim light it seemed to be alive. The detective could almost believe he saw its coils moving. Mersegret, guardian of tombs, eh? And the Professor was going to excavate some ancient tombs. Bet *that* would get Mersegret's goat.

Jerry grinned as he lifted his eyes to the painted head of the serpent, well above the level of his own.

Instinctively his leg muscles stiffened, propelling his sturdy body sideward and back in a swift leap.

Two fiery eyes were staring down at him with a gaze of concentrated hate! The eyes of the snake Mersegret—living eyes, Jerry could swear. He could see the play of reflected light in them.

He snatched at his gun.

Before he could get it out, the eyes vanished. There was nothing on the wall but the painted snake, with painted eyes of gilt and black, just as before.

"See *that*, Charken?" Jerry grunted.

Charken bounded suddenly to his feet, clutching at the air with frantic fingers.

"What? See what? What's wrong?"

"Nothing!" snapped the detective. "And, sit down!"

Charken slumped back into his seat and resumed his drunken mumblings.

It took nerve to walk up to that wall and put a hand on the painted serpent, but Jerry did it. . . . Cold smooth stone, smoother where the paint was laid on. Nothing more. Nothing living.

The eyes themselves were beyond the reach of his upstretched hand.

Jerry called himself all kinds of an idiot, but he *knew* he'd seen the eyes of that snake blazing with hatred, looking at him. He wouldn't be comfortable till he'd investigated. He'd drag the table over next the wall, mount on that and examine them. But the table was of massive teak. To move it, he'd need the help of one of the Sudanese. As for the chairs, they were spindle-legged gilt affairs too rickety to be trusted.

He walked over to the French window to call the Sudanese.

At that moment the first silver beams

of the new-risen moon slipped clear of a passing cloud, slanted down across the roofs of Alexandria and illumined the garden with their ghostly light.

Jerry saw his sentries at their posts, one pacing the wall, the other on the terrace near the window. He saw the fountain, with its statue of a cow-headed squat-bodied woman. He saw the Professor, sitting quietly in his chair amongst the little rose-bushes.

Standing in the open window, Jerry was about to speak to the Sudanese when from a window above his head a woman's scream rang hideously across that moonlit garden.

It was Selma—it could only be Selma!

"Stay at your posts!" Jerry barked at the Sudanese.

He whirled, gun in hand, bounded across the salon and out into the dim cavern of the great hall. The lights were out. He swung round on to the main staircase by memory.

Up he went, two steps at a time, shouting:

"Selma! Selma, where are you?"

He'd had no time, no opportunity to get the lay of the land upstairs—he didn't even know where her room was.

"Selma!" He was halfway up the stairs now. He forced himself to stop short, to listen, lest he rush blindly into a trap.

Pattering of feet—bare feet—coming down out of the gloom, coming down upon him with horrid speed.

He lifted his gun, straining his eyes into the darkness for the first glimpse of a moving shadow.

"Jerry!"

It was Selma's voice, very close, right above him.

"Here!"

His outthrust hand touched her bare arm. She was in her nightdress. The bare feet were hers.

He could hear her breath coming in quick little sobs.

"Jerry—" formality was forgotten now—"Oh, Jerry! The eyes! The blazing eyes! The snake's eyes! They were in my room—looking at me out of the darkness—"

Her hands were on his shoulders,

holding tight to him as though she meant never to let him go.

"Those cold stone steps won't do your bare feet any good, Selma," said Jerry quietly. "Come on down and have a drink. You'll feel better."

He picked her up in his arms and carried her down the stairs, between the silent hawk-headed warders of the great hall, and into the salon.

Charken was on his feet, swaying, clutching the table's edge for support.

"Wass matter? Wass wrong?" he demanded thickly.

"Sit down and keep quiet," Jerry bade him, settling Selma on one of the ridiculous chairs. "Here, Selma; drink this."

He poured wine for her, and she sipped it gratefully.

"Is father all right?" she asked after a moment.

"Sure. I just had a look at him out there in the moonlight. He's O. K."

Selma sighed with relief as she set down her empty glass.

"I guess I'm just a little fool with a bad case of nerves, Jerry." Her voice faltered a little with embarrassment as she realized the state of her attire. "But I could have sworn I saw those eyes. Can I see Dad from that window?"

"You bet," Jerry assured her.

Selma arose and trotted across the soft carpet, to stand by Jerry's side.

Through the open window the garden lay before them, bathed in silver light.

Atop the wall, the gaunt figure of the Sudanese sentry paced slowly along, swinging his cudgel, awake and alert. His comrade was walking up and down the terrace.

Beyond the ugly figure brooding above the silent fountain, Professor Crane lay at ease in his long chair. One of his arms trailed over the side of the chair. His head had drooped a little toward one shoulder.

"Why, he's asleep!" said Selma. "Poor old Dad! I must wake him and get him off to bed."

Heedless of her bare feet and filmy gown, she was out into the garden in a flash.

Along the path she sped, and around

the fountain, to stand at her father's side.

Jerry saw her put her hand on her father's head, saw her reach down to shake him by the shoulder, heard her cry out:

"Father! Father! Oh, my God!"

Her voice rose and broke as though strangled in her throat by a rush of horror. She dropped to her knees as Jerry reached her.

The moonlight picked out every detail with pitiless precision.

Professor Crane lay in the chair as though asleep, but his features were contorted with an expression of such horror that even Jerry's breath caught at the white gaze of those sightless, half-closed eyes. Blood, flowing from nose, mouth and ears traced dark trails across the Professor's face and neck.

Jerry leaned over quickly to feel for the heart.

His first realization was that the Professor's coat and shirt were sopping with blood; his second, that the whole body was a limp mass of bloody jelly, quivering and boneless, though still warm. There was no shape, no cohesion to that crushed pulp that had been Stanley Crane. . . .

Involuntarily Jerry spoke:

"Lord! Every bone in his body's been broken!"

With a gasping cry, Selma collapsed limply across Jerry's feet.

CHAPTER III

GHOST DEATH



had done all this.

"Here—both of you; on the jump!" Jerry called to the Sudanese.

The one at the door came leaping toward him in great bounds. The other swung from the wall by his hands, dropped, and came running likewise.

"Look!" Jerry's finger stabbed at

HERE was nothing to be done for the Professor; the poor old chap was beyond help. But there remained the murderer—the savage, bloody murderer who

the dead Professor. "I left you on guard—and the Professor *Effendi* is dead."

"Allah!" cried the foremost, lifting high his hands. "*Effendi*, I watch good. Nobody go near the chair. I swear dat!"

"You killed him yourself!" flashed Jerry. "No one else had the chance."

The black drew himself up with simple dignity.

"No, *effendi*. I not do it. I swear——" he broke off into Arabic, a long string of sonorous syllables.

The other Sudanese, coming up, cried out an Arabic phrase.

"They're all right, Jerry," said a quavering voice.

Selma was sitting up, one hand to her head.

"The first one swore by the ninety-nine names of God that he had not touched poor father, or seen anyone in the garden, and he prayed that the graves of all his ancestors might be defiled with the blood of swine if he spoke falsely or told you a single lie. No Moslem would think of betraying such an oath. The other one called out: 'And I likewise, Allah be my witness.' They're all right."

Jerry, lifting her to her feet, could not help admiring her nerve. To be able to think and speak so clearly at such a time! A great little girl, Selma Crane, with real grit.

As to the Sudanese, he was inclined to agree with her. The men were ex-soldiers with first-class records for bravery and devotion. They had been hand-picked and recommended by the American consul. It seemed impossible that they should be in the pay of Benjamin.

"Search the garden, then!" Jerry ordered. "The murderer must be hiding here somewhere. You're sure no one came in or out through any window?"

"No one, *effendi*. I not miss even a rat; my eyes see good in dark," swore the Sudanese who had guarded the house.

They scattered, pistols out, to search amongst the rose-bushes. Jerry, watch-

ing them, saw Charken come staggering out through the French window.

"Wass matter?" he demanded again as he lurched toward them.

"The professor. He's dead," said Jerry grimly.

"Dead!" The word seemed to sober Charken. He stood quite still for an instant, staring; his jaw slowly dropped. "But—but who—who could have killed him?"

"That's what we're trying to find out," Jerry snapped. "You help Miss Crane into the house; I'll join you in a minute."

"I can go by myself, Jerry," Selma said in a low voice.

And she went. Charken shuffled after her, seeming completely cowed by horror.

Then, inch by inch, Jerry and his men searched that garden.

There was little enough concealment possible. The rose-bushes were not large; there were no trees or thick shrubbery. Jerry went all round the walls, using his powerful flashlight, searching for secret doorways. He found nothing. The fountain was a bowl of solid cement, supporting a figure chiselled in black stone.

It was the figure of a woman with a cow's head, long pointed ears and heavy breasts. On the thick lips a sardonic smile seemed to rest as the statue squatted there in the moonlight, jeering, obscene.

"Hathor!" said one of the Sudanese. "Old time devil god."

Hathor—the goddess who in old Egypt had been the guardian of the tombs, the Professor had said. Who sometimes took the form of the snake Mersegret.

Well, there was no one in the garden, no concealed means of entrance. Two men had been watching the Professor, and for all the poor light before the moon rose, they would have seen anyone approaching him.

Yet he was dead. Beaten or crushed to death in some horrible, stealthy way.

"Pick up the Professor *Effendi*, men, and carry him into the salon," Jerry ordered.

So utterly broken was the poor body that the sturdy blacks had much difficulty in lifting it. When at last they had managed, Jerry examined the chair in which the Professor had been sitting.

It was of the "rustic" type, made of stout poles with the bark still on; the back and sides were interlaced with rattan or grass-work of some sort. It had ample arms, and a long comfortable foot-rest.

Jerry examined the arms and back of the chair in the hope of finding bruises on the bark which might indicate an attack or struggle. There were none; though the whole chair was, of course, foul with blood.

He looked beneath, and found that the main support of the chair was a stout upright beneath the center of the seat—branching out to form the back and arms.

He shook the thing; the arms bent under his vigor, but the chair itself was immovable. A garden fixture. For the rest, there was only a pool of coagulating blood. Nothing more.

Nothing in the chair, nothing in the garden—save Hathor and her jeering grin.

Jerry walked slowly back toward the French window.

They had placed the Professor on the teakwood table. Selma stood silent, holding one dead hand in both of hers. Two great tears ran down her cheeks. Charken had called for the servants, turned on more lights.

"We'll have to send for the police," Jerry said. "Better get a doctor, too. Maybe he can tell us the cause of death."

Selma nodded. Jerry spoke to Charken.

"Send your butler, will you? Have him go to the nearest police-station and bring whoever's in charge. Tell the cops it's murder, and to bring a doctor. Understand?"

Charken nodded dully, and the butler bowed and slipped out through the door leading to the great hall.

Jerry ordered a servant to get a robe and slippers from Selma's room.

The girl turned to him suddenly,

buried her face in the hollow of his shoulder and opened wide the flood-gates of her grief.

SHE was still sobbing when a stir in the hall betokened the arrival of the police.

Again their leader reminded Jerry of a Shriner patrol-captain, in his fez and gold-braided uniform, exactly like the one he had seen in the Arab quarter. With the inspector was a furtive beady-eyed little man in civilian clothes, introduced as Police-Surgeon Fahmy Mirseh.

The doctor made a swift and competent-seeming examination of the body. Every time he touched the upper part of the corpse it quivered and settled like a jelly.

After a moment or two the doctor jerked erect.

"Allah!" said he. "Efery rib iss broken! The spine iss snapped in t'ree place, the sternum in two. All the arm-bones are broken in so many places I haf not counted. Efen the pelvis iss fracture'. The vital organs, all crush' together—'orrible!' W'at 'as 'appen to dis man?"

"That's just what we don't know, doctor," said Jerry. "We hoped you could tell us."

"Me? 'Ow should I tell w'at hass produce' such terrible injuries?" the doctor snapped. His eyes were darting around the room like those of a frightened animal; they fell on the pictured snake and he jumped. "The poor man look as if he haf been crushed by heavy weight, or more, like he haf been squeeze' to death by some constrictive force."

The doctor was still staring at the snake.

"*That* might 'ave done it!" he said suddenly, pointing.

"The snake?" gasped Charken.

"Yess! Not the picture, but a real snake. I 'ave seen a calf w'ich 'ad been killed by a python in India. It was crush' like—like 'im!" He gestured toward the body on the table.

Jerry gave a sharp exclamation and fired a question at the Sudanese:

"Could a big snake have killed the

Professor-Effendi without your seeing or hearing it?"

"No, *Effendi*. If snake kill man like dat, mus' be very big snake. We sure to see," was the reply. "And snake not get away over white wall, widout we see. Not real snake."

"What do you mean, a real snake?"

The black lowered his voice, his eyes flickered furtively toward the snake on the wall.

"Maybe come one devil-snake, no can see," he muttered.

The doctor had been edging toward the door while he was speaking, and the police-inspector had turned several shades paler: like pouring cream into a cup of dark coffee.

He tried to cover his agitation with bluster. He could speak no English but he growled savagely in Arabic. The trembling Selma translated:

"He wants to know who was with Father last? Who last saw him alive?"

"Tell him the whole story, Selma, as far as you can," Jerry bade her. She obeyed, though her voice quivered with repressed sobs.

When she had finished the police-inspector was a pale lemon-color, with a tinge of green.

He jerked his thumb toward the Sudanese and shouted an unnecessarily loud order to his constables, who started timidly forward.

The two Sudanese, shoulder to shoulder, bared their teeth in angry snarls.

"What's he say?" demanded Jerry.

"He's going to arrest the blacks," Selma answered. "Says they must be guilty."

"Maybe they are, at that, but I don't think so," Jerry muttered. "Anyway it'll do no harm to have 'em in safe-keeping until we can dig into this mess a little more." He raised his voice a trifle.

"Don't start anything, men; if you're innocent, I'll take care of you."

"Good. We trust you, *Effendi*," said one of the Sudanese. They laid their pistols and clubs on the table, and allowed the constables to take them by the arms.

The police-inspector jerked his thumb

toward the door; obediently the prisoners started. But the one who had spoken looked back from the doorway to give a last word to Jerry:

"Better you go too, *effendi*. This is a devil-house, like I tell you before-time. We not kill the Professor-Effendi. Hathor-devil she kill." He pointed a black finger dramatically at the pictured snake. "You not go, she kill you too," the Sudanese concluded.

They were gone, and the doctor after them. The little medico was muttering and shaking with fear. The inspector tried to keep up appearances, but his knees were knocking together as he followed his men into the great hall.

There were other constables there; one of these the Inspector bade remain to guard Professor Crane's body. The man began a trembling protest, but the Inspector cut him short. Duty was duty!

"You will all attend at police-court tomorrow at noon," he directed. "Without fail, remember. In the name of His Majesty the King of Egypt!"

The outer door slammed behind his hasty departure.

"There's something in this house those guys are scared of; they were wild to get away," said Jerry. "Hell, they didn't even take a look at the garden! Mr. Charken, who'd you rent this dump from?"

Charken shrugged his shoulders.

"A friend of mine in N'Yawk fixed it, like I said," he answered. "Feller named Eli. He had the butler down to meet me at the ship. What a lemon he handed me, that Eli—damn him!"

"Who owns the place?"

"I d'know. Some millionaire that spends all his time in Paris, but I can't remember his name."

Jerry called the butler and put the question to him.

The butler bowed profoundly.

"The house, *effendi*," he said, "belongs to the exiled Khedive, Abbas Hilmi Pasha."

A palpable lie; for the property of the ex-Khedive had been sequestered by the Government. So whispered Selma instantly. Jerry, seeing he was getting

nowhere, dropped that line of inquiry.

"Selma," he announced, "I'm going to take you back to the hotel. This is no place for you now."

"I won't leave father!" the girl protested.

"I'll have the Consulate send an undertaker for the—for him," Jerry assured her, "as soon as I can fix it with the cops. Charken, will you stay here while I help Miss Crane with her bags?"

Charken nodded with ill-grace. Being left alone with a corpse and a badly scared Egyptian cop didn't seem to be his idea of pleasure. But Jerry dared not let Selma out of his sight in this house.

AS THEY went up the stairs together he tried to tell her what he was feeling:

"I made a bad mistake, Selma, in bringing your father here," he said. "It was my idea, and God knows I meant it for his protection. It brought him to his death. I'm sorry—mighty sorry——"

He spoke now with the careful English of earlier days, not the New York argot that had come to him later. The girl glanced at him curiously. So deep was her interest in this stocky, blue-eyed young man that even in her hour of grief she noticed the little things about him.

"It didn't, Jerry. They'd have gotten him anyway. He wouldn't have left Egypt, and they'd have killed him in the hotel or any place else. It wasn't your fault." Her tears were over. Selma Crane again faced the world, gallant and unafraid.

They were at the door of her room now.

"I'll wait in the corridor," Jerry said.

She left the door half-open; and she was back, dressed and carrying her hand-bag, in a remarkably short time.

"Jerry," she said as he took her bag, "there's one more thing I must do. Father would want me to; he'd never forgive me if I failed. And to do it, I must get that permit he has in his coat pocket."

Jerry nodded agreement, and after finding his own bag in a room farther

along the corridor, they went back to the salon. The policeman was out in the hall. Charken, seated in a chair as far as possible removed from the body, had resumed his intercourse with the wine. The butler was bringing in a fresh bottle, and him Jerry despatched for a cab.

"What pocket, Selma? Inside—coat—right." Jerry was fumbling with the crushed and sodden garment. "Nothing there. I'll try the side pockets—no. Trousers—no. Selma, it's not there. It's not on him at all!"

"He had it when he came downstairs to go into the garden. I'm absolutely sure of that; I saw the end of the long envelope as his coat swung open," Selma said. "It can't be gone! It just can't!"

"He must have dropped it in the garden, then," said Jerry. He took out his flashlight, went into the garden and examined the paths and the chair. No sign of a big white envelope anywhere.

"Snakes," muttered Jerry, "may kill people—but they don't steal papers."

He went back to the house and reported failure.

"It's been stolen," he said shortly.

The girl didn't answer. Her face was a drawn mask of despair.

Jerry went over to Charken.

"Sorry to leave you, Mr. Charken," he said, "but Miss Crane can't stay here any longer. The place is getting on her nerves. Don't think your hospitality isn't appreciated, but we've got to get her away."

Charken jumped up.

"I'm going with you!" he cried. "D'you think I'd stay *here*? No—no—take me with you!"

"Come on, then," said Jerry. "but make it snappy."

Charken poured himself another drink and tossed it off at a gulp.

"I'll go as I am," he announced. "I'll send for my bag tomorrow."

He didn't dare go upstairs for it.

The butler came gliding in.

"The cab, *effendi*."

They called the policeman from the hall and bade him remain with the corpse; he looked at it with frightened eyes.

Selma Crane bent over and kissed her father's dead face.

Then they went out of that room of death.

A gust of fresh air blew through the great hall as they entered it.

As though at a breath of the ancient gods, the lights went out, leaving them in Stygian blackness. Charken whined with fear.

Selma's hand closed on Jerry's wrist.

"Look—oh Jerry, look!"

One of the hawk-headed figures at the foot of the stairway was glowing—a dreadful phosphorescent greenish glow, like a bale-fire in a graveyard.

And its eyes were staring at them! Those same blazing, hate-filled eyes that had looked out from the head of the snake Mersegrat.

Jerry dropped his bag. His right hand was on his gun when the Thing spoke, in a harsh, grating, horrible voice, in English:

"Leave this house and never return, accursed of the Gods! To return is death—the death that is reserved for Sacrilege! Go!"

Instinct told the girl that Jerry was going to take a shot at the hawk-headed brute. She grabbed his hand just in time.

"No, Jerry! They'll kill us all! Come on, while there's time! Come on!"

She dragged him toward the door, and he went because he feared to lose touch with her in the darkness. Charken stumbled after. All round them as they hurried along that echoing hall, gilding their steps by memory, they heard stirrings, rustlings, whisperings. It was as though the ghosts of all Egypt's ancient gods were closing round them.

They all but fell down the steps to the main door and saw the stars above, shining serenely down from the dark arch of heaven. The door crashed shut; the cab was there. Its driver hustled them inside, stuttering with anxiety to be gone.

"Drive on—quick!" moaned the frightened Charken.

"What street is this, driver?" Jerry demanded, as the cab began to move.

The answer was a flood of Arabic,

intermingled with an English word or two. Selma translated in a low voice:

"He says it is called 'The Street of a Hundred Demons'," she said. Then after a little pause: "It seems—sort of—inhuman to leave Father there—alone—" her words caught on a sob—"but I've got his work to do. And I'm so glad to be gone from that dreadful place!"

"So am I," answered Jerry through clenched teeth. "But I'm coming back!"

CHAPTER IV

VIPER'S NEST



THE moon was again hidden behind clouds when Jerry Lang returned to the Street of a Hundred Demons.

He had employed well the two hours that had passed since he left the house where Professor Crane had died.

Charken had engaged a room at the hotel and hurried off to bed—half drunk again and wholly terrorized. Selma had gotten a room, while Jerry was busy sending off a cablegram in code to his employers in New York. Eleven P. M. in Alexandria was only three p. m. daylight time in New York, and he could hope for an answer that night.

Then he succeeded in routing out of bed a most distinguished authority on the religious customs of ancient Egypt, recommended by Selma Crane: a testy old German gentleman, much annoyed at being disturbed, who had nevertheless proved willing to talk at some length on the crime of Sacrilege among the ancient Egyptians, and its dire penalties.

Sacrilege, it seemed, had two principal forms. One was the killing of a sacred animal, especially the bull Apis or the sacred cat of Bubastis. The other and more common was the robbing of tombs. Egyptians frequently buried considerable treasure in the way of jewels and gold ornaments with their dead; but woe to the man who was caught trying to steal them! The usual penalty was "burial alive." The living criminal was bound up and wound about with

strips of waxed linen, like a mummy, and left to perish miserably of hunger and thirst in the darkness of a closed tomb. There were other penalties, such as the crushing of the unhappy victim beneath the great stone that sealed the mouth of the tomb he had robbed—and still other ways—

Jerry had listened to all the old savant had to say, with increasing interest.

Back in Selma's room at the hotel—conventions were forgotten in the urgent necessities of the moment—he had spoken briefly to the girl.

"I've got to hurry, Selma. I think I'm on the right track; I've got to be sure before they take the evidence."

"You think—" began the girl, who had not been present during his talk with *Herr Oberwalden*.

"I'm not saying what I think till I'm sure," Jerry cut her short. "When I come back, Selma, you and I are going to have a showdown. Stay in this room. You've got a gun—if anyone you don't know tries to get in, shoot first and ask his name and address afterward. I've phoned the Consul, and he's told the local police he'll hold 'em personally responsible for your safety. See you later!"

As he hurried down the corridor, he chuckled. She'd jumped when he made that crack about a "showdown."

At the desk they told him there'd been no reply to his cablegram as yet; he couldn't wait.

By a circuitous route, with two changes of cabs, he came back, as he had promised, to the Street of a Hundred Demons.

The one street light was out now, the street was dark as the Pit itself. Scurrying clouds overlaid the stars and the moon was gone behind an inky mass of vapor.

Jerry wasted no time on the door.

He located the house, paced carefully off the exact distance to the next side street, picked his way through that noisome thoroughfare for a block, turned left, and paced his distance along a narrow high-walled alley till he was exactly opposite the rear of the house he sought.

He looked up; the wall by which he stood was some twelve feet high. If Jerry wasn't mistaken, it was the garden wall itself.

From beneath his flowing burnous, purchased in an all-night shop in the Rue Sherif Pasha to disguise his silhouette in the darkness, Jerry produced other purchases made at the docks: a stout coil of light rope, and a small but sturdy grapnel.

"Gadgets!" he muttered, grinning. "Gadgets are always useful!"

He coiled the rope on the ground so that it would run freely, gripping the free end in his left hand; then whirled the grapnel round his head on about two feet of rope and sent it whizzing up toward the top of the wall.

It struck a coping stone with a loud *whang* and fell back. Jerry had to jump quick to dodge it, and it hit the ground with a thud. The alley wasn't paved, or the clangor of iron on cobbles would have been terrific.

Jerry groped for it, found it, re-coiled his rope and threw again—more carefully this time. Over! Now to check the rope—*clang—bang*—she's caught, but what a racket!

Jerry'd already noted that the outside of the wall was of undressed stone, not plastered over smooth like the inner side. It afforded him some foothold. Up he went, braced out at an angle hauling himself hand over hand by his rope and aided by toe-grips on the wall. A final heave, and he sprawled half across the top of the wall, peering down into the blackness of the garden, trying to see—anything.

There was no light in the house, save a faint glow from the French window of the salon, where doubtless the policeman still guarded the broken corpse of Professor Crane. No sound, either, though Jerry listened carefully and long.

His noise must have passed unnoticed.

He dragged his rope over the wall and let it down inside—in case he couldn't find the ladder—then he swung by his hands, as the Sudanese had done, and dropped easily to the ground.

From where he squatted he could see the ugly bulk of the statue of Hathor against the gloomy sky.

Guiding himself by the statue, he moved stealthily away from the wall, half-crouching, ready for anything—

Out of the darkness an unseen finger dragged across his face, scratching him sharply. He lunged forward—into the rose-bush whose thorns had wounded him.

The chair should be here somewhere—ah—his hand touched the rough bark and he jerked back as though he'd touched the slimy chill of a serpent's back. He was getting jumpy.

Again he listened; no sound broke the eerie silence of the garden.

He took out his flashlight and turned it on the chair. The beam dazzled him by its brilliance, so foreign to this garden—which had been a garden hundreds, maybe thousands of years before flashlights were thought of. He examined the chair, back, arms, seat, footrest, legs—

What was that?

Gravel crunched under an incautious foot.

Jerry snapped off his flashlight and bounded to his feet just in time to meet the rush of a body hurtling through the air, straight at him. Down he went in the soft earth of a flower-bed. His shoulder felt the bite of a knife's point, but it was only a glancing blow. His left hand flashed up and grabbed the descending wrist instinctively, his right, locked its fingers about a corded throat just in time to choke into a gurgling gasp a rising howl of alarm.

The man fought like a devil unleashed from hell. Twice he almost tore his knife-hand free, all the time he beat and smashed at Jerry's face with the other—blows which Jerry could only partially fend off by shifting his right arm and shoulder.

Over and over they rolled, writhing, kicking, striking; through it all, that iron grip of Jerry's closed tighter, ever tighter on a throat which was beginning to throb with its owner's frantic efforts for breath.

At last the blows stopped. The knife

fell from the fingers which had hoped to drive it home in Jerry's body. Both hands went up in the final instinctive effort of self-preservation, up to try to tear free that strangling grasp.

Jerry, gauging well in the darkness the position of his enemy's head, swung up a short chopping left with such a savage vigor that it fairly lifted his own body off the ground.

Thuck! His fist went home on a hard jaw; the straining body of his opponent collapsed limply.

Jerry, panting, on his knees, heard no other foe stirring in the dark garden. He'd risk a quick on-and-off snap of his flashlight to see who this guy with the knife might be.

The butler. Out cold—he wouldn't worry anybody for quite some time.

Doubtless the man had seen the flashlight beam and had come out to investigate, not wanting to raise an alarm needlessly.

HIS head buzzing from his exertions, Jerry crept cautiously across the garden to reconnoiter the salon.

The body of Professor Crane lay on the table, just as he had last seen it. The police-constable had apparently taken up the attack on the wine of Cyprus where Charken had left off. He sat in a chair, his head nested in his arms on the table's edge. Asleep?

Jerry put the question to immediate proof by tiptoeing into the room. The policeman did not move. Across the salon went Jerry. He reached the door leading to the great hall, paused, looked back.

The policeman stirred slightly; there came to Jerry's ears the sound of a gentle snore. On the farther wall the snake Mersegret coiled in painted horror as though about to pounce upon the sleeping man; but the eyes of the great serpent were dead and lifeless.

Jerry stole out into the darkness of the great hall.

Here was the staircase; he felt along the rail, came abruptly on the hawk-headed figure which had warned him so harshly never to return to this house. He ran his fingers over its terrific head.

There were the eyes—glass, they felt like—certainly the thing was a metal statue; impossible that it should be alive.

Again Jerry peered into darkness, every sense alert.

Before he started across the tiled floor of the hall, where a single careless foot-step might betray him, he wanted to be sure—

It was light. Not a reflection from the faintly yellow rectangle of the salon door, but a different, ruddier glow. It played and flickered on the floor of the hall, now plain, now vanishing.

It took Jerry only an instant to realize that it came from one of the curtained doorways between the great pilasters supporting the arches of the roof. Then he stole forward once more, gained the nearest pilaster, slipped round it and across the interval to the next, and so at last, without a sound, came to the source of the ruddy light.

Now he heard the low hum of voices, speaking in Arabic. Damn the luck! He hardly knew enough Arabic to ask the way to the railroad station.

Very, very cautiously he lifted the edge of the curtain and peered through the aperture thus made.

He saw a room, lighted by a flickering oil-lamp with panes of pinkish glass. The lamp-stand was a tall affair of hammered silver; beside it was a round table, at which sat three men with their heads close together, talking.

The back of one was toward the watching Jerry; he wore civilian clothes of ordinary cut, and a fez. The second was muffled in a burnous which all but hid his face; in the poor light Jerry could not make out his features. But the third wore only a light tunic of some white material; his face stood out clearly under the lamp.

It was a horrible face, wrinkled with age and dominated by a great beak of a nose that jutted out above a thin, lipped-cruel mouth. His head was shaven as bare as a billiard ball. He looked, Jerry thought, like an unclean carrion bird, an ancient vulture.

Then he turned his head slightly as the man in the fez spoke, and Jerry saw his eyes.

Those glowing, red, infernal eyes that had stared at him from the sockets of the serpent, of the hawk! Eyes with the quality of glowing in the dark, glowing with age and hate and dreadful knowledge of things evil beyond all human ken.

The man in the burnous stirred impatiently.

"Fer God's sake," he snarled in an East Side accent, "cut out yer damn Ar'bic chatter, will ya? It's been so long since I spoke it, I can't getcha at all. Ya both speak English."

"As you like," replied the man in the fez, in English, instinctively speaking louder as men do when employing a language other than their own. "The main point is, we've got the permit—" he tapped his finger-nail against an envelope that lay on the table in front of him—"and by changing the name to my own, as I can do with some skill, I can start work in the morning. Thanks to Allah, there is very little blood on the paper. The local officials will ask no questions—I've seen to that—and by the time the Museum authorities hear of Crane's death and start raising hell, we ought to have what we are seeking and be safe in Turkey."

Jerry was gripping the curtain with tense fingers. That voice—that cold precise voice—it was the same voice that had spoken to the Professor in the dark street, warning him to leave Egypt or die!

Should he pull his gun and stick 'em up—now?

No—better wait—find out what was going on—

"Quite so!" snarled the old man—the harsh voice that had spoken from the hawk-head! "It remains only for us to agree on the division of the spoil. And I, Kallikrates, Priest of Hathor, claim half as my rightful share."

"Half, hell!" ripped out the man in the burnous, "and leave the rest to be cut three ways? Who did all the doity woik? Who took all the risk? Who stole the damn rug for ya an' brung it to Alexandria? Me, that's who! If anybody gets half, it's gonna be *me*!"

"And who told you of the treasure

and its connection with the rug in the first place?" cut in the man in the fez. "Remember, also, that I alone of us have sufficient scientific standing to do the actual excavation."

Jerry was learning things fast. A treasure, eh?

The old man chuckled evilly.

"Not so fast, my friends, not so fast!" he said, his yellow teeth gleaming in devilish mirth. "You forget that I alone have solved the secret of the rug, by the use of powers beyond the ken of either of you. And that secret I will not reveal until you have sworn to give me half the treasure!"

Red, savage, horrible, his eyes glowed with a dreadful triumph.

There was a moment's silence.

The man in the fez shrugged his shoulders.

"You have us there, Kallikrates," he admitted. "Take your half."

The man in the burnous growled grudging assent.

"Take it, damn ya," was his surrender.

"Swear it! Swear it on all you hold sacred! On the dread vengeance of Hathor!" cried the old priest.

They swore—a blood-curdling series of oaths.

From the breast of his tunic the priest produced a crackling bit of parchment.

"Here is the plan," he said. "The entrance is here, at the north end of the crypt; so—now this turn—now that—now into the central chamber—this is the passage—this the 'loculus'—and in this niche is the burial place of Orestes. It is plain?"

"Quite plain," purred the man in the fez. "I cannot fail to find it."

The man in the burnous stirred suddenly; the hood of the burnous fell back from his head.

Jerry had seen too many photographs of that hang-dog face not to recognize it instantly. It was the face of Rufus Benjamin, Charken's absconding manager!

"You're sure ya can't go wrong?" Benjamin snapped at the man in the fez.

"Positive!" was the answer.

"I guarantee it!" the priest of Hathor grated.

"Then here's yer half share!" yelled Benjamin, flinging his whole body out of his chair and half across the table like a striking snake.

A wicked, curved blade flashed in that murderous hand—the steel buried itself in the old priest's wrinkled throat just as the lamp tottered, flared and toppled over.

The room crashed into inky blackness.

But in that last flare-up of the lamp Jerry had seen something else—the pattern, the glowing colors of a rug which hung against the wall just behind the lamp.

Charken's rug!

On the stairway a voice called out shrilly, was answered by others. A light flashed on in the gallery. The servants were waking. No chance of taking Benjamin with him—odds too great—but the rug—

Slipping out of his own burnous, he plunged through the curtain into the room beyond, ripped the rug free from its fastenings, jerked his knee into the stomach of a man who tried to grapple with him in the darkness, and was back in the hall again.

He ran like a deer for the salon door, rolling up the rug as he ran. Luckily it was only a small one. Men were running down the stairs; above his head the first ring of one of the chandeliers burst into light.

"Ai! Ai!" They saw him—a pistol-shot crackled from behind, another from the stairs—*Spang!* A bullet starred the stone doorpost as he plunged through into the salon. The policeman was rising dazedly from his chair. Jerry straight-armed him, sending him flying back against the snake-painted wall.

Into the garden—where was that damned ladder? Here! Staggering under the weight of ladder and rug, he ran for the rear wall, crashing through flower-beds and rose-bushes, heedless of thorns.

A dark shape lunged at him suddenly from behind the fountain. Clutching hands tore at him, slipped clear. For

an instant Jerry had the mad fancy that the goddess herself had leaped from her pedestal to attack him; then the moon slipped out from her pall and he saw the pain-twisted face of the butler.

One last desperate grab, as the over-balanced man went down, caught Jerry's ankle and sent him sprawling. From the French window a yell of excited triumph went up. Flying feet crunched on the gravel path.

Jerry kicked his ankle free, jumped to his feet still gripping the ladder. Like a battering ram he swung it at the butler. The fellow staggered back, screaming.

Here came the others. The wall—

Quick! Up with the ladder! Jerry flung it aloft as though it had been a straw. The rug—there it was—up he went, silhouetted now in the moonlight against the white plaster.

But pistol-shooting by moonlight at a moving target is an affair of luck and nothing else.

Crack! Crack! The dark garden gleamed with the orange flare of pistol-flashes—*Spat!* Bullets chipped the wall—*Thud!* One hit the rug.

Panting but unhurt, Jerry gained the top of the wall. He dragged the ladder after him, clear of the upflung hands of a running man below by inches only.

He flung the ladder over into the street, leaped after it, rug and all, landed heavily on his feet, staggered, gained his balance and ran for his life through the Egyptian night.

CHAPTER V

THE WOVEN CLUE



THE rug lay on the floor of Selma Crane's room in the Hotel Cecil.

It was a small rug, about three feet by six in size. Its nap was worn with the passage of years, but its colors, woven in a series of geometrical patterns, seemed to have lost none of their brilliance with age.

Crimson, yellow, blue, dark green,

crimson again. Crimson, the color of blood.

Jerry Lang stared at the rug grimly. That bit of gaudy carpet had brought two men to their deaths that night. Why? What secret did the thing conceal, that men should steal and cheat and kill for it?

Why? Why? That question hammered in the back of Jerry's brain with the insistent beat of a battle-drum.

He knew that he should have no peace until it was answered.

For that was Jerry's weakness and his strength—he could not leave a question unanswered, a mystery unexplained. A loose end, a trifling detail that didn't quite fit would torment him night and day until he had found the reason. It was this mental twist that had made him a detective, and brought him so quickly to the high regard of his superiors.

Some men might have stopped with the recovery of the rug. He had, in fact, done all that could be expected of him; his firm's client would now suffer no loss, and the murders of Professor Crane and the old priest were for the Egyptian police to worry about. But that wasn't Jerry's way.

And there was Selma.

The girl, fully dressed, sat on the edge of the bed, looking at the rug with eyes that were at once probing and hostile.

Jerry had told her the whole story of the recovery of the rug; save for a gasp of horror at the stabbing of the old priest, she had listened in absorbed silence, offering no comment.

A thoroughbred, that's what she was—none of your hysterical, clinging-vine janes, but a real thoroughbred.

Jerry Lang, direct of thought as of action, could no longer deceive himself. He loved this girl. He refused to believe that she or her father had had anything to do with the theft of the rug. But if they had, he meant to shield her from the consequences. And if possible, he meant to hand over the murderer of her father to Egyptian justice.

As for the rest—well, time would tell. A fine-spirited, sensitive girl like Selma

might find it hard to forgive him when she discovered his real business in Egypt, found that he had lied to her, tracked her and her father, suspected them—

She looked up suddenly.

"Jerry," she said, her eyes fixed on his, "you're a detective, aren't you?"

That came a little too close to mind-reading!

"Yes," Jerry admitted, and waited for the storm to burst.

Instead Selma allowed her lips to curve in a faint smile.

"I thought so," she said. "Just intuition, if you like—plus the remarkable drag you seem to have with the American Consul. And you suspected father of having helped to steal that— that rug! Didn't you?"

"Yes!" said Jerry with just a tinge of defiance. "Only now——"

"Now you don't think so any more," cut in Selma. "All right, Jerry. I don't blame you. That photograph you saw in father's lap must have looked bad. Are you working for Charken?"

"Not exactly. I'm with the Red-dington Agency, who work for the surety outfit that was on Benjamin's bond," Jerry answered. "Technically I'm all washed up now that I've got the rug back. No loss on the bond. But——"

Selma's eyes, which had wandered to the rug, came back to Jerry's. There was something new in them, something which he could not read.

"But—what, Jerry?" she prompted as he paused.

"You spoke of your father's work, of completing it—you can't do much by yourself!" Jerry said gravely. "And those dirty rats that killed him are still running loose. Will you let me help you, Selma?"

For answer the girl rose to her feet and held out her hand.

"Of course, and thanks a lot," she said.

Jerry gripped her slender fingers hard. What a girl! Instead of bawling him out, she'd realized his position, made allowances, and given him her friendship, her trust.

Selma went right on talking:

"A while ago, Jerry, you spoke of a showdown between us. You've given me your confidence; now for my part. That rug there—you're wondering about it?"

"And how!"

"Here's the story," said Selma Crane. "It's a long one, so sit down and light a cigarette. One for me? Thanks.

"You'll have to go back about fifteen hundred years, when Egypt was a province of the Roman Empire, and Christianity was just rising out of the flames of persecution into a place of power. About that time a fiery, fanatical prelate named Cyril became Patriarch of Alexandria. He clashed immediately with the prefect—the local governor—a pagan named Orestes. There were terrible riots, Cyril stirring up the Christian mob against the Imperial troops.

"Orestes, a man of much perception, saw that the downfall of paganism was near. He was a wealthy man, and something of an antiquarian as well; he possessed what was probably the finest collection of ancient Egyptian ceremonial jewelry in existence. Now it was the pleasant custom of the Christians of that day to smash up and destroy everything they could lay hands on, however lovely or valuable, that had any connection with the more ancient religions of Rome or Greece or Egypt. Orestes knew well what would be the fate of his beloved jewels if they fell into the hands of the Christian mob. They were his chief treasure; and if anything happened to him, he knew that they would enable his wife and family to live comfortably in Rome or elsewhere."

"Why didn't he beat it while he had a chance—go to Rome himself?" Jerry wanted to know.

"He was a Roman officer, you see. He couldn't leave his post of duty," Selma explained. "And his wife wouldn't desert him. So the problem was how to conceal the treasure. Now beneath the city there was a series of underground passages, a regular maze, called the catacombs. There are simi-

lar ones in Rome; neither in Rome nor in Alexandria have the full extent of these tunnelings ever been explored. They were used as hiding-places, churches, cemeteries, by the Christians in the days when Christians were hunted like wild beasts.

"Orestes resolved to hide his treasure in the catacombs: in one of the innumerable 'loculi' or small tombs hidden in their branching passages. He did so at dead of night, aided by a single slave whom he immediately murdered. He then wrote an account of what he had done and his reasons on a roll of parchment, which he entrusted to his wife, together with a plan of the catacombs showing how to reach the treasure. But she, clever woman, realizing that such a plan was a dangerous thing to have about, wove a small rug in the design of which she incorporated the main features of her husband's chart, which she then destroyed. And she added to his parchment scroll a note to this effect in her own writing.

"Not many days afterward, Orestes was killed while trying to quell a riot in the city, and his wife and family had to flee out of Egypt. En route to Athens in a small ship, all were murdered by a band of criminals who had heard of the treasure. The criminals themselves were arrested. Under torture they confessed the murders and were crucified by the governor of Achaia, but no traces of the treasure, the scroll or the rug were discovered. Since that time, many searches have been made in the catacombs for Orestes' treasure, and in several cases the searchers had lost their way in the terrible black maze and died in there of thirst or bad air; but the jewels have never been found."

"And you mean to say that *that* rug——" exclaimed Jerry, pointing.

Selma, absorbed in her story, went on as though she had not heard him:

"About fifty years ago the scroll of Orestes, with his wife's foot-note, turned up in a monastery in Italy, among a lot of other mouldy old documents and junk that had laid forgotten for centuries. It confirmed the well-known tales about the treasure being hidden in

the catacombs and about the secret of its location being woven into a rug. It also gave several secret marks by which the rug could be identified. But how could a carpet be expected to last fifteen hundred years? Dampness, moths, wear and tear would destroy it in a hundred. Scientists agreed that there was no use searching for the rug of Orestes; that it had long since crumbled into shreds.

"Then about a month ago, one morning in New York my father saw a notice of a special sale of rugs and Egyptian antiquities, part of the estate of the late Doctor Lewis Forde who had been medical adviser to the Sultan of Nejd—in Arabia, you know. The sale was being conducted by Charken, who had bought in the whole lot as a speculation for his firm, and father went, hoping to pick up some odds and ends of interest. The first object upon which his eyes rested was a rug which struck him as being entirely out of the usual run—that rug on the floor there!"

Jerry jumped.

"But I thought you said——"

"Wait, Jerry. I'll explain. The rug was then priced by Charken at seven thousand dollars." ("Why, the dirty gyp!" thought Jerry. "Trying to soak the bonding company fifty grand!") "Father saw that it was a very old rug, one conforming to no system of weaving he'd ever heard of, yet in a marvelous state of preservation. In a flash of inspiration it occurred to him that the thing *might* be the rug of Orestes. There were Egyptian symbols, certainly: and the dry air of the Arabian desert might preserve fabrics indefinitely. He went out and telephoned his assistant at the Sydenham Institute, where there was a copy of the scroll of Orestes. He reviewed the identifying marks.

"Returning to the salesroom, he identified them all. Picture his excited joy! Charken had no idea of the treasure he possessed. He appeared to think that its chief value resided in the fact that it had once belonged to the Sultan of Nejd. He had never heard of Orestes. Father didn't enlighten him further, but for a hundred dollars he bought per-

mission to photograph the rug. The miracle had happened; the rug of Orestes had lived through the centuries!

"Father went straight to the trustees of the Sydenham Institute, whose Egyptian curator he has been for many years. I was with him; he was walking on air, the happiest man in New York. For his reputation was made. After a lifetime of plodding, steady work with no breaks, no great piece of luck, no outstanding discovery—*this* had come to him. His name would rank with the very first Egyptologists; for lists of the treasure of Orestes have come down to us, and it contains articles of simply priceless antiquarian value, dating back for thousands of years. Of course the Royal Egyptian Museum would take half, that being the Egyptian law; the Sydenham Institute would get the other half. There would be special display cases in both museums—perhaps special rooms for them—brass plates: 'The Stanley Crane Collection'—articles in all the leading scientific journals.

"Father was in the seventh heaven. But he came down to earth with a bump. The trustees didn't share his enthusiasm. They were skeptical about the rug being genuine, about it lasting so long. At last, after much argument, they agreed to buy it—and when Father went back, Charken had smelled a rat and raised the price. Wanted twenty thousand dollars. Father almost wept as he pleaded with the trustees again. No use. They wouldn't see it at that price. Said he ought to be able to do as well with the photographs he had, as with the rug itself. They financed this trip to Egypt, and through Mr. Marmaduke of the Royal Egyptian Museum permission was applied for to excavate in the catacombs. Then——"

She stopped her well-knit narrative and her eyes filled with sudden tears. Jerry understood. But his practical streak was uppermost as he asked:

"Wasn't there any dough in this for your Dad, if he succeeded?"

Selma shook her head, brushing away the tears with a handkerchief already sodden with grief.

"Not much, anyway. A raise in

salary, perhaps, and lecture fees. But the distinction, the reputation, the lifting out of the crowd—you can't know what all that means to a man like father, who lives only for science. To lead, not to follow: to be quoted, to be deferred to, and most of all to establish a name that would live after him! All this was Father's dream, his dearest hope in life."

A sudden enthusiasm seized upon Jerry Lang.

"We'll give it to him yet, Selma!" he said firmly. "We'll find that treasure. Let's have another look at the rug."

HE SWITCHED on the wall lights as he spoke, and together they bent over the rug. Its design was regular and symmetrical: a series of rectangles and lozenges interspersed with other figures, and connected in a complicated pattern.

"Here is one of the identifying marks," Selma said, pointing to a small upright cross with a loop instead of an upper arm. "That is the 'ankh,' the ancient Egyptian symbol of life."

"How was your father going to find the treasure?" Jerry wanted to know, after a few moments' examination of the rug had convinced him that little was to be learned from staring at it.

"He was going to visit the catacombs," Selma explained, "and try to get some idea of their general layout. Then he was going to draw a plan of them, or parts of them as his survey proceeded, and try to relate that plan to the pattern of the rug as shown by his photographs."

"A good idea," Jerry agreed. "Probably all those squares and things represent rooms in the catacombs."

"I don't think so," Selma demurred. "There are only a few underground chambers big enough to be called 'rooms.' For the most part, father said, the catacombs are just a maze of narrow passages with little branches leading off for tombs and other purposes."

Jerry was already knitting his brows over another problem:

"How do you suppose," he wanted to

know, "that old priest ever worked the thing out so quick? Of course that's all bunk about magic."

Selma's answer rather surprised him.

"There's no doubt, Jerry, that the old Egyptians knew a good deal more than some of us give them credit for. And I've been in the Orient enough to know that even now there are some things that happen in these ancient countries that can't be explained by our Western standards. As for the old priest, are you sure he really had solved the riddle of the rug?"

Jerry nodded firmly.

"I am," he replied. "He had no motive for kidding his pals, when their first try would show him up. He had the dope all right, and that rat in the fez has it now. Too bad I didn't have a chance to grab the plan as well as the rug."

"Yes, and the permit too," Selma said.

"That won't be any good to 'em,"

Jerry observed. "They won't dare use it. If anybody showed up with it, the cops'd grab 'em."

"I don't know!" said Selma. "Funny things happen in Egypt. You notified the police about Benjamin?"

"Not the police; the American Consulate," Jerry answered. "They'll get the cops on the job."

"I wonder," said Selma, "how Benjamin learned what the rug was, and why it was so well worth stealing?"

"Way I dope it out is this," Jerry answered. "They got suspicious when your Dad wanted it so bad. Charken thought of raising his price; but the photograph business worried brother Benjamin. He had pals out here; he caught on to the name 'Orestes,' mentioned by your father—and he did some cabling. They turned up this jack-leg scientist, this fez-wearing rat, and he told 'em who Orestes was. So Benjie swipes the rug and comes to Alexandria. But it takes 'em quite a while, magic or no magic, to dope out what it's all about. Your Dad shows up, and they're scared to death he'll get his permit and start to work, maybe find the treasure before they can stop him. Then Charken arrives—"

"They probably knew he was coming long before he left," cried Selma. "By using this man Eli in New York, doubtless a confederate of the gang, they steered Charken to that awful house. That way they meant to keep an eye on him, maybe to kill him if they got a chance."

"That's about it," agreed Jerry, "except that last. I can't see what they'd have to gain by killing Charken that would measure up to the risk of committing murder. Listen, Selma, what's the actual value of this treasure?"

"I don't know," she replied. "One list, made up by the Orestes' confidential steward about a year before the treasure was concealed, gives the sizes and settings of some of the jewels, and if it is trustworthy, the *intrinsic* value should be about half-a-million dollars. The list was found engraved on a sheet of bronze, and doesn't appear to have been tampered with."

"Half a million! Whew! Must be bulky, then—we'll need a Mack truck to drag it away," Jerry observed.

"No," denied Selma. "It's supposed to be all in one casket, made of bronze with gold inlay, and stamped with the 'ankh' and Orestes' cypher. Probably not a very large casket: the value is principally in jewels, not gold. But Jerry—I was speaking of intrinsic value. The worth of these things from the antiquarian viewpoint is beyond calculation. If those scoundrels could get them to Turkey—which country does not extradite to Egypt—they could sell the things one by one to collectors and museums and literally realize millions!"

"No wonder they went to so much trouble, then!" Jerry exclaimed. "Look, Selma—it's getting light outside. Let's wake up Charken and tell him we've got his rug; then we'll take it over to the Consulate for safe-keeping. I don't want it here in your room. Too dangerous."

GRAY morning was indeed breaking in the streets of Alexandria, and already the hum of traffic was coming up from the Promenade de Reine Negi. A country which perforce must rest

during the terrific heat of midday and early afternoon, must improve the cool morning hours.

Charken answered promptly to their knock on his door, but wouldn't open until he made sure of recognizing Jerry's voice. Toused and grumpy in a dirty bathrobe, he snapped out of his grouch instantly when he saw the rug. He pounced on it with both hands, eyes starting from his head, but Jerry shoved him back.

"Got to take this to the Consulate, Mr. Charken. It'll have to be sent back to the States under consular seal, and turned over to my agency's clients there, who will deliver it to you and claim release under their bond. Lot of red tape, but there's no help for it."

"But—but the rug is mine! Mine!" protested Charken excitedly. "You have no right to keep my property from me!"

"You come on over to the Consulate after breakfast, Mr. Charken," Jerry advised, "and talk to some of the officials. They'll tell you I'm right."

"I'll be there," Charken said, looking rather sulky. Then he brightened. "But anyway, Mr. Lang, you've done a wonderful piece of work to get back my rug. Wonderful! How did you find it? Did you arrest Benjamin?"

"I'll tell you all about it at the Consulate," Jerry promised. "I can't wait now. S'long."

And with Selma he hurried off down the hall, the rolled rug under his arm, leaving Charken still babbling.

The hotel lobby was just waking up; porters, sweepers, pages were in evidence—a page called them a rickety taxi, and it lumbered off with many a wheeze and groan.

Jerry sat with his hand in his side coat-pocket, resting on his gun; the rug, still rolled, between his knees. He watched every turn, every passing vehicle, until they pulled up with a final jerk and squeak in front of a brown stone building.

"See that sign over the door, Selma?" cried Jerry as he helped the girl out of the cab. "Doesn't that eagle look good, with the old Stars and Stripes on his chest?"

They hurried into the Consulate.

A native clerk, at the sound of Jerry's name, ushered them at once into the Consul's private office. The Consul himself, a ruddy, hearty-mannered man, came forward from his desk to receive them. He looked decidedly sleepy and his Palm Beach suit was crumpled and out of press.

"I've been up all night on this affair of yours, Lang," he said when greetings were accomplished. "Miss Crane, I know that the condolences of a stranger on the death of your poor father won't matter to you; but believe me, I am sincerely sorry. You'll be glad to know that I've had your father's body removed by the English undertakers, Tompkins and Son, to their mortuary chapel. Now, Lang, I—er—the fact is——"

He came to a stammering halt, evidently at a loss how to proceed.

Jerry charged right in with a blunt question:

"Have the cops made a pinch yet?"

The Consul shook his head in an embarrassed fashion.

"As I told you when you telephoned, Mr. Lang, the police appear very reluctant to move in the matter at all," he replied. "They now claim they have searched the house from top to bottom and have found no trace of anybody other than that of Professor Crane, no sign of blood or of anyone having been murdered as you described. Their constable on duty admits there was some little disturbance during the night, but says he thinks it was no more than a quarrel among the servants. There was no one in the house when it was searched, except the constable and one servant—not the butler."

"But good God!" burst out Jerry. "Are they going to sit back and let Benjamin and his pals get clear away?"

"There's politics in this somewhere," the Consul explained, "though for Heaven's sake don't quote me as saying so."

"Oh!" Jerry saw a great light. He was used to this sort of thing back home. "The cops've been called off, huh? Must be that crook in the fez. Yeah—

he said something about fixing up the local authorities. Wonder who he is?"

The Consul was tapping the edge of his desk with a pencil, nervous and worried.

"It's hard to say," he replied. "I've wired our Minister at Cairo, and perhaps something can be done. But right now the police simply won't give us any cooperation at all. They're making some pretense at activity, but they're really doing nothing. For your private information, Sayyid Kassim, the chief of police here, is one of the biggest scoundrels unhung—he'd hush up the murder of his own mother for a big enough bribe!"

"It's tough when you're up against a crooked boss cop," said Jerry from the depths of his experience. "Well—there's one place has to be watched now. Professor Crane had procured a permit to excavate in the catacombs. These birds've stolen that permit—right off the Professor's dead body—and they'll try to alter the name and use it to do some excavating of their own. They'll move fast. Your police chief certainly can't refuse to have the catacombs guarded, and to pinch anybody who shows up with the forged permit?"

"I don't know." The Consul was doubtful. "The entrance to the catacombs is in the crypt of the old Church of Saint Basil. It's kept locked and sealed, because of irresponsible idiots who've wandered inside, got lost and never found their way out. The only guard is the old sexton of the church; but maybe Kassim will put a man on duty. We'll see."

He picked up the telephone and asked for a number.

"Police Headquarters? This is the United States Consul speaking. Give me the Chief Constable, please. What?—" Here followed a flood of emphatic Arabic. There was a pause.

"Hello! Sayyid Kassim *Effendi*?—Good morning!"

The Consul broke into Arabic again, talking vigorously. A pause—then sharp words of insistence. Another pause. Abruptly the Consul slammed up the receiver.

"Go to hell, then!" he barked at the

silent phone. "He won't do a thing, Lang. Not a thing. I talked to him in Arabic so he couldn't pull this 'I didn't understand' stuff on me afterward. He won't move. Good as said he didn't believe a word of your story. He won't act on it at all; of course his saying he doesn't believe you is his alibi if Cairo starts to jack him up."

Jerry swore softly.

"The idea is to give his pals time to get into the catacombs and find this swag," he remarked. "It'll be some time before you'll get the authorities at Cairo moving, won't it?"

"I'm afraid so," the Consul said. "Of course if only Americans were concerned, I'd have jurisdiction to act. Egypt's an 'extraterritorial' country; the consuls of the powers have full control over their nationals, even to acting as courts in criminal cases. An American, for example, who commits any crime in Egypt, must be tried before the nearest American consul; he can't be tried by an Egyptian court. But if this scoundrel with the permit has such a pull, he's undoubtedly an Egyptian."

"Then there's no way at all to stop them using that forged permit?" demanded Selma incredulously.

"Not if the police won't cooperate," answered the consul. "Egypt's a different country since the British took their hands off the reins, let me tell you. There are a few British officials still in the Egyptian service—they're all right—but unfortunately none of 'em are in the police of Alexandria. We're just up against it."

The telephone rang loudly—three or four times.

"Hello!—Yes. This is Richardson.—Oh, good-morning, sir!—You have? That's fine! On the ten o'clock train, eh? Now we'll get somewhere. We're being double-crossed here; can't give you the details on the wire. But Stafford'll straighten 'em out. Thanks for all the trouble, sir. Yes—I'll write you full details and send 'em down by courier. Good-bye."

Relief shone in the Consul's eye as he hung up the phone.

"It's all right after all," he cried. "That was our Minister at Cairo. He's been after the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior on my original report of the Professor's death, and they're sending a British official of the Egyptian police service, Superintendent Stafford, to take full charge of the investigation. I know Stafford—a good man, and square's they make 'em. He'll snap these birds out of it in a hurry. He'll be here at ten o'clock, and I'm going to be at the station to meet him."

Jerry glanced at his watch.

It was just seven—three hours to go. Lots of things could happen in three hours. He remembered his appointment with Charken, but he couldn't afford to wait for Charken now.

He got to his feet.

"Mr. Consul," he requested, "may I leave Miss Crane here for a little while? I've got to go out, and I don't think she's very safe on the street right now."

"Certainly," said the Consul. "We'll have some breakfast, eh, Miss Crane?" But Selma wasn't thinking of breakfast.

"Where are you going, Jerry?" she demanded—with what Jerry hoped was real anxiety.

"Oh, just out," Jerry grinned. "Don't part with that rug, Mr. Consul—I'll get your official receipt for it later. Stay right here till I get back, Selma."

He was gone before the girl could utter a word of protest.

CHAPTER VI

CHARNEL HOUSE



THREE hours would be plenty of time for those devils to get the treasure and lose themselves in the rabbit-warren of the Arab quarter; or even to get aboard a

ship and be off.

Jerry didn't mean to give them the chance.

He hailed a passing carriage—there were not many taxis in evidence.

"Take me to the P. and O. office," he called loudly, for the benefit of any trailer that might be following him, or

watching the Consulate. But when the hack was round the first corner he seemed to change his mind.

"Driver! Do you know the Church of Saint Basil?"

"Yaas, *effendi*! Me know um!" The brown face grinned cheerily.

"Then get there quick—chop-chop—hurry up!"

"Dam' fast!" interpreted the driver, and whipped up his horses.

With every minute of that rattling journey Jerry's impatience increased. Suppose they were there ahead of him?

High to his left loomed the red shaft of Pompey's Pillar, bright in the morning sun. This building on his right looked like a church: a gloomy edifice, towered and buttressed and built throughout of heavy blocks of a grayish stone. Yes—there was a cross. This was the Coptic quarter; the street was a wide one, and there were not so many children and mangy dogs in evidence as in the Arab sections.

The driver started to pull up, jerking an indicative thumb.

"Keep on going," Jerry bade him. "Next street—turn left. That's the idea. Now stop."

He hopped out.

"What's your fare? Ten piastres? Here you are—and here's a gold sovereign. Want it?"

The man's eyes glistened. It is not every day that an Alexandrine cabby comes upon a sovereign.

"It's yours—to forget you ever saw me, or that you've been near the Church of Saint Basil this morning. Understand—forget me—forget church—all gone!"

Eagerly the cabby nodded, clutching his gold-piece.

"I know, *effendi*! I say nothing—mouth shut like Sphinx."

Jerry watched the fellow out of sight round the next corner. Then he turned back toward the Church of Saint Basil.

He had already noted that one-half of the great center door stood open, probably for the convenience of early worshippers. But he was hardly prepared for the dim grandeur of the interior.

At the farther end or the high altar rose beneath a dome of magnificent proportions. On either side of it were lesser altars, fenced off from the nave by screens of ivory whose beauties Jerry could see only in outline. This was a Coptic church, built with windowless walls; light came only from the splendid stained-glass windows of the dome.

An acolyte in crinkling vestments moved across the chancel. The air within the church was thick with the odor of incense, and a lamp burned steadily before the high altar. On the steps by the chancel rail a handful of worshippers knelt; no one else was in sight between the rows of massive columns that, flanking the nave, supported the vaulted roof.

Without, the city busy in the sunlight; within, peace, dignity, and rest. Jerry, hat in hand, found himself tiptoeing as he moved to the left along the rear wall, looking for stairs leading downward to the crypt—to the catacombs.

Passing a beautifully carved holy-water fount, he came to three small doors. The first showed stairs within, right enough; but they led upward, either to the belfry, or to a choir gallery.

The second door gave access only to a closet. But the third showed him a narrow stone stairway leading down into a sort of flickering gloom. One look round—no one in sight. Very cautiously Jerry descended.

At the bottom of the stairs he paused to reconnoiter.

This was the crypt of the church—a place of innumerable pillars supporting low arches, and vanishing, in seemingly endless procession, into the darkness of the crypt's farther recesses. About ten feet from the foot of the stair, a single ancient lamp guttered and smoked on an iron wall-bracket, casting a feeble circle of yellow light about it. Jerry could see nothing else; no sign of human presence. He listened—heard only a distant scurrying, as of rats.

He started along the wall, meaning to make the circuit of the place. Somewhere in that wall he should find the door that led into the catacombs.

He had not gone a dozen paces from

the lamp when he found himself wrapped in complete darkness. Dared he risk his flashlight? Yes; for he could see the stairway, could make out the feet of a man descending before the man could possibly catch sight of his flashlight's beam.

That beam went promptly probing into dusty, cobwebby gloom. It flickered over the square stone pillars, over the walls of the crypt, over the heavy flags of the floor. Rats squeaked in terror and fled before it; Jerry, reaching a corner, turned right along the side wall.

He moved as silently as he could, using his flashlight only at intervals. There was still the chance that the man in the fez might have been early on the job, might be in the catacombs, or even lurking in the crypt itself somewhere.

But Jerry came to another corner—the rear wall, directly under the high altar—without encountering a sign of life save the rats and a scorpion or two.

He had not taken ten steps in the new direction when he saw the door.

It was a low door, not more than five feet high, made of stout iron bars crisscrossed in a heavy grille. It was secured by two thick bolts, top and bottom, held fast by padlocks passed through the rings of their handles. The upper bolt was further secured by a ring of steel wire whose ends were imbedded in a great blob of lead imprinted with the royal arms of Egypt.

The seal was intact; Jerry was in time.

THE lamp by the stair was now just a yellow blob far away across the crypt; the darkness seemed to press round Jerry, isolating him from the world of light and denying the very existence of the sun that had shone so brightly—that still shone, up there somewhere.

Pressing his face to the rusty grille, Jerry peered into the gloom that lay beyond, flashing his light through one of the square openings between the crossed bars.

His first impression was not from his eyes, but from his nose.

A smell—unlike any smell he ever remembered before.

Musty, damp, faintly reminiscent of the smell in an old cellar and of coal-gas—most of all, old. A smell that told of rot and decay, of a foul and untended old age, of neglected, unlighted centuries.

Jerry's light showed him a narrow passage, lined with some whitish stone and with a flat ceiling of stone slabs. In two places within reach of the beam, the stone lining of the walls had fallen down and damp earth had tumbled into the passage, partly blocking it. The floor appeared to be of trampled earth; at one spot a pool of foul mud had formed, where water dripped from above. The diffused light of the beam lost itself in the passage, which apparently had no end, leading off into the very bowels of the earth. There was no more to be seen.

There could be no doubt that this was the entrance to the catacombs.

Jerry switched off his light and moved back, away from the door, taking up a strategic position behind a pillar where he could see the staircase.

With the rats scampering about his feet, he stood there reviewing his plan. It was based on his experience with crooks and his knowledge of their ways.

He was quite sure that Benjamin and the man in the fez would arrive together—neither trusting the other, after the manner of crooks. Jerry meant to arrest Benjamin at the pistol's point and march him off to the American consulate where, as a naturalized American citizen under the consul's jurisdiction, Benjamin would certainly be detained on Jerry's information, either for the murder of the old priest or the theft of the rug, or both.

But wouldn't that leave the man in the fez free to get the treasure by himself and make off with it?

Jerry didn't think so. His idea was that Fez would trot right along, not daring to seem to abandon Benjamin for fear the latter would get sore and tell everything he knew. Fez would use all his pull, work like the devil to jar Benjamin loose from the grip of the law. And at ten o'clock Superintendent Stafford would arrive to take things in hand! The crooks couldn't know that; they'd rely on their bribed Chief Constable,

Sayyid Kassim. Stafford was Jerry's ace in the hole.

Something stirred in the darkness behind him.

Rats again: scurrying, hurrying—or was it something else? A stealthy foot-step? Jerry half-turned, his thumb on the bottom of his flashlight.

Squeak! A rat, of course.

What was that? Another sound—from the stairway this time.

They were coming!

Moving figures in the yellow light of the lamp—one—two—three.

Just as Jerry had figured. The three must be Benjamin, Fez, and the sexton.

They were moving across the crypt, coming straight toward the little door between the central rows of columns. One man, in advance, came on with shuffling steps, swinging a lantern. The others, talking in low tones, followed.

Jerry drew back a little farther. He drew his gun and held it in his right hand, shifting the flashlight to his left.

The man with the lantern reached the door, turned to speak to the others. He was a bearded old Copt, in a sort of semi-clerical gown and a black skull-cap; a huge ring of keys dangled at his belt. The sexton, of course.

He spoke in Arabic, in a high quavering falsetto. The cold tones of a well-remembered voice answered him, somewhat impatiently. Into the circle of lantern-light stepped a slender, well-built Egyptian, wearing a smart sack-suit and a fez. A black moustache neatly pointed and waxed, adorned his swarthy face, of which the principal feature was a long tapering chin.

He was in the act of producing a paper from his inside coat pocket, still grumbling—doubtless at the sexton's insistence on seeing it.

The sexton, lifting his lantern, made a careful examination of the permit, spelling out each word with many mumblings and hesitations. Jerry caught the name: "Vakhuz Bey."

Then Jerry's attention became fixed on something else—on a pair of brilliantly polished riding boots just at the edge of the circle of light. Funny things for Benjamin to wear—

The boots moved forward, their owner saying something in brisk official tones. The light revealed not Benjamin, but a smartly uniformed officer of Egyptian police!

Fez had come without Benjamin after all. Jerry couldn't even make a bluff at arresting an Egyptian subject with this police-officer standing by.

What a lousy break!

The police-officer's words were apparently intended to convince the sexton that the permit was O.K., for the old man stopped reading, carefully folded the paper, handed it back to Fez, and started pawing through his keys.

Selecting one at last, he opened the padlocks. Using a heavier key as a lever, he pried open the seal, reverently preserving the lead blob. The bolts slid back with a shriek of protesting rust; hinges long unused squalled loudly as the grille swung open.

The police-officer shook his head in answer to some question in Fez' cold voice. The latter nodded, and, stooping, entered the passage. As he did so, he switched on a small flashlight.

The police-officer and the sexton watched him go.

Jerry didn't like this arrangement at all. Here was Fez going in alone to get the treasure, leaving the entrance guarded. The breaks were getting worse.

No! The sexton, turning, was shuffling off toward the stairs. And the police-officer was going with him, his duty done, glad to get out of this damp ill-smelling crypt.

BEFORE they were halfway to the stairs, Jerry had slipped off his shoes, hung them about his neck by the laces, and had darted through the open door of the catacombs on the trail of the man in the fez.

There was the flicker of a flashlight, well ahead. Jerry sped in pursuit, his stockinged feet making no sound on the earthen floor of the tunnel.

The roof wasn't high enough to let him stand upright. He had to crouch a little. The quarry kept on, apparently unsuspecting; on along the noisome

tunnel, in which the air grew steadily worse.

Jerry was within twenty feet, now. He slowed his pace; no use overtaking the man too soon. He'd had to make a sudden change of plans. Arresting Fez without Benjamin wouldn't do much good, so he'd let Fez lead him to the treasure—then stick him up, take the treasure away from him and somehow get it to the American Consulate. The legal end of this high-handed act could be straightened out afterward. Jerry meant Selma to have her treasure.

The light ahead suddenly disappeared. In the resulting darkness Jerry almost plunged full tilt into a wall of stone that barred his progress. The end of the tunnel? No, there was the light again, at his left. Just a turn in the passage.

He must watch more carefully, or he'd lose Fez. He couldn't depend on his ears. The man's steps were as silent as Jerry's. Must be wearing rubber-soled shoes.

He saw the light swing right and vanish—a right turn, this time. Rounding it in the dark, Jerry stumbled over some loose earth and just saved himself from going sprawling. The bad air gave him an almost irresistible desire to clear his throat.

The light ahead vanished again. But this was no turn. Jerry distinctly heard the tiny click of the thumb-switch.

He moved on very cautiously, feeling his way along the wall of the passage—and suddenly the wall was gone.

In utter darkness he pawed for it, found nothing. Just space. He reached up, gradually straightening his body from its cramped stoop: nothing above. Nor to the left.

Jerry was conscious of the first throb of panic. Then once more he saw the light, far ahead of him. Thank Heaven! He hurried on, trying to catch up. The passage must be much wider at this point. The floor beneath him was of stone, now.

The light was gone again.

Jerry began groping for the receded walls. He must find them—must have something solid, something tangible in this pitch darkness. He stumbled again

—and not earth, too hard; not stone, too light. He stooped, felt of the thing—felt teeth, eye-holes—dropped it with a throb of disgust as he realized that it was a human skull. The skull of some poor devil, lost in this stinking black pit.

Where was the wall?

He plunged forward, groping. If only Fez would switch on his light again—

The light came, suddenly, blindingly, square in Jerry's face. Before he could life his gun, before he could even realize what was happening, something struck him a terrific blow on the head. Dazed, he went to his knees. Waves of pain reeled through him. His dark torch flew from his hand and clattered on the stone floor.

He groped for it, felt it—then a hand brushed his, the torch was snatched from his fingers. He staggered to his feet, trying to see something to shoot at. Hopeless. He listened with all his ears. Nothing.

What a sap, to let that Fez guy take him that way! He felt a violent urge to kick himself.

From the darkness a voice spoke—the cold measured tones of the man in the fez. It rang hollow and weird, as though echoing in a vast cavern. Jerry, finger on trigger, tried to locate it and could not. Now it seemed to be here, now there.

"Yankee fool!" said the voice. "To think I would not hear your clumsy feet behind me! Do you know where you are?"

Jerry didn't answer. He was straining every effort to locate that voice.

"Ha-ha!" A note of dreadful laughter. "You're in the great central chamber of the catacomb, from which there are ninety-nine exits. Ninety-nine, fool—and all but one lead farther and farther into unknown passageways, twisting and turning, passageways of which no plan, no chart exists, passageways filled with the bones of dead fools like you!"

Again that laugh. Jerry realized by this time that the man was moving about as he talked.

"Ninety-eight ways to death—and only one to life!" the voice continued.

"Only one passage leads to the outer air. Perhaps you will chance upon it before you die or go mad—but I think not, fool! I could shoot you like the dog you are, but this way is better: for if they ever find your bones, who shall say—'This man was murdered?' They will say instead—'Just another fool, lost in the catacombs'! Ha-ha-ha!"

There followed silence.

Utter, complete silence in that awful darkness.

The man was gone, and Jerry's flash-light with him.

Jerry was alone in the catacombs. Alone with the dark.

But he fought down the rising tide of panic, fought too that primitive fear of darkness that lives deep-buried in every human heart. He stood where he was, waiting—until far away he heard for the last time that mocking, triumphant laugh.

Then he moved straight ahead, correcting his natural tendency to bear too much to one side, until his outstretched hand found a stone wall before him. Not a masonry wall, but one cut in the living rock.

Along this wall he groped until he came to a doorway.

From his vest pocket he drew a little metal cylinder with a clip like a fountain pen. He pressed a button. A tiny ray of light stabbed through the gloom and illumined a bright circle on the rocky wall.

"Just a gadget—but *what* a gadget!" muttered Jerry.

Stooping, he ran his light over the edges of the doorway, shook his head and moved on to the next exit.

CHAPTER VII

TREASURE-TROVE!



"FUNNY things to save a man's life, aren't they Selma?"

Selma and Jerry sat side by side at the Consul's desk. They were alone in the private office. The Consul had gone to the railway station to meet Superintendent

Stafford, and they were awaiting his return.

Selma's hand tightened on Jerry's for an instant.

"I used to think you were silly to pull your clothes out of shape by carrying all that junk in your pockets," she said. "Silly! And now——"

She gestured toward the two objects on the Consul's blotter—a nickel-plated "fountain-pen" flashlight, and a fat stub of green crayon.

"If you hadn't had that crayon!" she went on. "If you hadn't *remembered* you had it, and thought of marking a continuous line on the wall on your way in through that horrible passage——"

She stopped, appalled by the thought of Jerry lost in the catacombs forever.

"Anybody that's had as much trouble as I have following the green line in the Grand Central subway station *ought* to think of some scheme like that," chuckled Jerry. "The mark wasn't so easy to locate, though; guess I looked at forty or fifty exits before I saw my good old green line on that white stone. After that it was a snap; the Fez man had bolted the door into the crypt, but hadn't locked it. I came right on out, nobody saw me. Not even the sexton."

"What do you think the Fez man will do now?" Selma asked.

"He'll sit tight, Jerry opined. "He won't go in after that treasure while he thinks I'm in there with a gun, able to track him; for of course he can't find it without using his light. He'll wait till he's sure I'm dead, or gone mad—two or three days, probably, unless he hears I'm out."

"In which case he'll make a quick rush to get the treasure and be off!" Selma observed. "Too bad we can't locate him and watch him so we could carry out your original idea of letting him lead us to it."

"Too bad we can't solve the secret of that rug ourselves," Jerry remarked, looking at the carpet of Orestes as it lay on the floor in one corner of the Consul's office.

The sun was streaming brightly into the room. After a moment Jerry went

over, picked up the rug and spread it on the desk. Its bright colors, its complicated design seemed to defy him to wrest their secret from them.

"I thought, after being in the catacombs, I might pick up something," he remarked. "But it looks just as much like a crazy quilt as before. Ninety-nine exits—but there doesn't seem to be any symbol that's repeated ninety-nine times. Say! Wait a minute—w-a-i-t a minute——"

He bent forward eagerly. The girl jumped up and ran to his side.

"This black square here in the middle—it's the only black in the rug—could that be the central chamber, do you suppose?" Jerry wanted to know. "Black—to represent darkness?"

"You might be right, Jerry!" Selma cried. "Oh, I wonder if—no. No, that won't do." The lilt died out of her voice. "If that was it, there'd be other black tracings to represent the passages wouldn't there?"

"I suppose there would," Jerry admitted. "And there aren't any. Plenty of red and green and blue lines, but they all appear to be part of the regular pattern."

"That's why the pattern's so complicated," Selma observed. "It's to conceal the secret; to distract your attention from what is really significant."

"Then it's the things that aren't all over the pattern—that aren't repeated again and again—that count," Jerry deduced, his trained wits hard at work.

"Like this blue square here with the cross in it," cried Selma. "See, Jerry! There are a lot of blue squares, but only one with a cross—and the cross isn't very plain, just a little darker blue, as though it was trying to hide. We wouldn't have seen it at all except for the sunlight."

"I wonder if that could represent the church?" Jerry mused. It was a chance shot, but it struck fire from Selma's quick mind.

"It might!" she exclaimed. "Blue, in ancient days, was supposed to be the Christian color, and the Copts have worn blue turbans for centuries."

Jerry was scrutinizing the rug with avid eyes.

"Then if we've located the church—and the central chamber—" he ejaculated, talking in short excited bursts as he searched the fabric, "we ought to be able to pick out the passage between 'em—the one I marked with the green line. The one—Well, for crying out loud! Look at that!"

His finger was tracing a devious course along the surface of the rug.

"See it, Selma? See it? That thread of green?"

She did see it; though in a dim light or under casual inspection it could hardly be distinguished. A thread of green, of a brighter hue than the dark green used so liberally in the regular pattern; almost hidden yet easily followed once you knew where to look.

"See!" cried Jerry again. "It starts from the blue square—that is, from the church. It turns left, just as the passage does; then it turns right again and comes to the black centerpiece. Again just like the passage. A green line—I'd never have noticed it if I didn't have green lines on the brain this morning. What d'you know about that?"

"We've found something, all right," Selma agreed. "Now where do we go from here?"

Jerry was poring over his green line.

"It's pretty well worn away at the edge of the black piece," he pointed out. "No—here's some more, Selma! It doesn't stop at the central square—it turns to the right and runs along the edge—see—here's a bit of that same green—here's another—it comes to the first corner——"

"And goes out of the square again, right at the corner!" Selma exclaimed. "It's interwoven with the pattern, with the dark green, but it goes on to—to—to this! And there it ends."

Her finger was planked down on a symbol—one which appeared in other parts of the rug—the looped cross, or ankh. The Egyptian symbol of Life.

Did it have some special significance here?"

"I'll betcha," said Jerry Lang, high lifted on the crest of soaring inspiration, "that if we find the treasure, we'll find that symbol carved in the rock some-

where nearby! And I remember that corner; there's a passage leads off right there——"

"You've got it, Jerry!" Selma sprang to her feet, her eyes aflame with excitement. "Come on—let's go——"

The door swung open.

On the threshold stood a tall, spare, bronzed man in well-starched white ducks, his sun helmet in his hand. Over his shoulder the Consul's cheerful face beamed at them.

"Miss Crane—Mr. Lang—meet Superintendent Stafford."

They swallowed their sudden impatience and shook hands with the newcomer; Jerry rolling up the rug with the air of one who merely clears an impediment from a desk.

THE British police-official had little to say at first.

He listened to Jerry's account of the events of the preceding night without interrupting.

"I know the house," he remarked when Jerry had finished. "Bad lot, that old priest. Runs a fortune-telling game; receiver and worse on the side. Hm."

"Receiver?"

"Eh? Oh—Yank, aren't you? What you call a fence."

"Oh, a fence!" That was a word Jerry knew.

"Quite. Very bad lot—always has thieves hanging about. Lot of secret passages and silly mumbo-jumbo tricks—all these ignorant fellahin in a blue funk about him all the time. Police, too."

Those eyes in the wall! In the figures! Well, well!

"They were scared to death last night," Jerry observed. "That's an old house, isn't it?"

"Very old," the Superintendent said. "Grown old in wickedness, you might say. Like its owner. The priest owns it, y'know. Kalikrates. Or did until last night."

He turned to the girl.

"Miss Crane," he said, "I've stopped at the mortuary on my way from the station to look at your father's—ah—body——"

The girl gulped back a sob; all the excitement, all the enthusiasm drained out of her as water might drain from a tank. The sickening memory of her loss swept over her again and held her fast in its gloomy clutch.

"—and," the Superintendent was going on, "I can offer no opinion as to how he died, or who—what—killed him. I only know that in the past forty-odd years, since there have been British police in Egypt and records have been kept, we have had five separate occurrences of identical nature!"

Jerry leaned forward, tense with interest.

"Five different times, persons have been found dead, crushed as Professor Crane was crushed," the Superintendent affirmed. "All were found in Alexandria, though in various parts of the city. Let me see"—he was thumbing through his note-book—"there was Inspector Blake of the police, in 1885—body found in the Mahmudiyeh Canal; Doctor Nugent, of the staff of the Egyptian Museum, in 1897—just after the Den-shawi riots—his body was found jammed into a trunk in the railway-station; an unidentified Greek or Levantine, in 1899—body discovered in an empty coal-lighter alongside the Ras-el-Tin Docks; Ahmed Pilrey, an Egyptian subject with a bad criminal record, in 1908—body picked up in the gutter on the Rue Sherif Pasha, where it had evidently been thrown from a carriage; and finally, in 1924, an Englishman named Orme, known to be a swindler and card-sharper, but never convicted of any crime—his body was found in a small handcart in a street only two squares from the house where Professor Crane met his death!"

"Nobody's ever been convicted for any of these killings?" Jerry demanded.

"Not a soul," the Superintendent admitted. "There were various theories advanced from time to time as to how the victims had been killed—some medical authorities said by means of a hydraulic or other press; some by being crushed beneath heavy stones; the snake idea was brought forward in the Orme case. But nothing was proven. I may add

that in the Orme case, in which I was concerned in a subordinate capacity, considerable political activity was in evidence tending to hush the matter up."

"As there has been in this one!" interjected the Consul.

"Does the name 'Vakhuz Bey' mean anything to you, Superintendent?" asked Jerry.

The Superintendent looked up quickly.

"Rather," he replied. "He's by way of being a scientist, this Vakhuz Bey; used to be with the Royal Museum. But he was mixed up in several shady deals, misuse of museum funds, smuggling antiquities out of the country, selling permits, all that sort of rot. He has a sort of Professorship in one of the Royal Colleges now. The fact is, the fellow comes of a very highly-placed family; his cousin's my immediate superior, the Minister of the Interior, and one of his brothers is King Fuad's principal chamberlain. So it's been hands off Vakhuz Bey, though we've proof that in recent years he's been a moving spirit in a gang that's been selling fake antiques to credulous Americans with more money than brains. My private opinion is that the man's a thorough-paced scoundrel."

"Slender, well-dressed, small black mustache waxed at points, long chin, cold precise voice, speaks excellent English, always wears the fez—that the man?" Jerry shot out.

"That's Vakhuz Bey!" The Superintendent's eyes were gleaming. "Why do you ask?"

"He's the 'man in the fez' I've been telling you about!" Jerry snapped.

"Hell's bells!" exclaimed the Consul. "No wonder we weren't getting any place——"

"We *will* get some place!" Superintendent Stafford was flushing beneath his tan. "If Vakhuz is mixed up in a murder case, we'll try him for it if I have to go to the King of Egypt in person, by God! I'm sick and tired of being dragged off good cases by slimy Gypsie politicians!"

"We got the same thing in the States," muttered Jerry. "Politicians—

you've never seen politicians till you see the mob we got in New York."

The Superintendent had grabbed up the phone and was talking to Police Headquarters—in Arabic, of course, but in tones that left little to the imagination.

When he was finished:

"There'll be a little action now," he remarked. "They're sending a man to guard the catacombs and pick up Vak-huz if he comes back. I'll have the whole detective force out looking for him and for your friend Benjamin in fifteen minutes."

Jerry's mind was working along a different line:

"Just one minute, Superintendent," he spoke up as the officer rose and started for the door. "I've got a question and a favor to ask."

"Righto!" agreed the other.

"You caught one servant out at the house, or rather the native police did. Has he made any statement?"

"Couldn't, poor devil. He was a mute—tongue cut out, you know."

Selma gave a little gasp of horror. The East was still the East—

"That's that, then," growled Jerry. "Here's the favor: you say your men are now guarding the catacombs. I'd like to get a pass that'll let me go in and out. I'm not through with that place yet."

"Certainly." The Superintendent scribbled hastily on an official form and handed the paper over. "But be a bit careful, Mr. Lang. I rather think this crowd is gettin' to the end of their rope, and they'll be desperate."

"Oh, I'll be careful," Jerry grinned. "I could use those two Sudanese—" he ventured tentatively.

But the Superintendent shook his head.

"Cawn't let 'em go yet," he said. "Wouldn't do, y'know. Have to have 'em before a magistrate—though I don't suppose they're guilty. Well, cheerio—I've got to be gettin' behind that scoundrel Kassim."

He went out with a purposeful air.

"He's O.K., but cops never work fast enough," Jerry growled. "I gotta get busy. I suppose, Mr. Consul, there's no doubt at all of Miss Crane's standing with regard to this treasure, is there?"

"What do you mean, exactly?" countered the Consul, with true official caution.

"Why, as her father's heir, she's entitled to carry on his work, isn't she? So if the treasure's recovered, she'd be entitled to her half share just as her father would've been, reserving the other half for the Egyptian Museum? She doesn't want it for herself—just for her Dad's honor and scientific reputation."

The Consul cleared his throat a couple of times before he answered.

"Pretty hard question, that," he said finally. "The permit was issued to her father, not to her. If the treasure was here, in this Consulate and in her possession, I'd say yes—there'd be no doubt that half was hers. American law would apply. But with all that money at stake, I'm afraid the Egyptian officials won't take the same view of it. There'll be sure to be some technicality—and if Vak-huz or his gang get hold of it, good-night!"

"But if we had it here in the Consulate, Miss Crane's rights would be protected?" Jerry cut in.

"Absolutely. Different case altogether then; if they gave me any argument I could take 'em right into the Mixed Tribunals and get a squate decision in no time. No hope of getting the treasure here, though, I'm afraid. By the way, Lang, the police sent over a couple of guns belonging to you that they picked up last evening—the ones you lent to those two black boys I sent you. Here they are."

The Consul took the two automatics out of his desk. Jerry slipped one into the empty shoulder-holster under his left arm-pit, leaving his regular gun in his hip pocket. Rather to his surprise, Selma picked up the other and put it in her hand-bag.

"I might need this," she remarked, "and I left my own at the hotel."

"Was Charken here this morning?" Jerry asked, as he rose to go.

"Yes—seemed pretty upset." The Consul answered.

"I forgot all about him—I was supposed to meet him here," said Jerry. "Bet he's sweating blood. Thanks for

all your help, Mr. Consul. I'll see you this afternoon. S'long, Selma!"

Jerry found a taxi right outside this time, and told the driver to take him to Pompey's Pillar. He could walk to the church from there.

But as the gears clashed, the door was jerked open again.

Someone was scrambling through the doorway: Jerry's fist came back——

"Wait, Jerry!"

"Selma! You can't——"

"I don't care!" Panting and flushed with her exertions, the girl flounced back into the seat as the taxi moved off. "I know where you're going—and I'm going with you. I've got to do something to take my mind off—off——"

"All right," Jerry agreed hastily. "I don't suppose there's much danger. They won't be back before this afternoon, unless they get all hot and bothered about Stafford."

THERE were more lamps lit in the crypt at Saint Basil's now; and at the foot of the stairs a policeman was pacing back and forth. He challenged them smartly as they descended, but saluted when he saw Stafford's pass.

"Ask him if anybody's inside, Selma."

The girl put the question in Arabic; the policeman shook his head vehemently answering with a sputter of words.

"Not a soul, he says," translated Selma.

Leaving the policeman staring after them, they crossed the crypt. The grated door was ajar, just as Jerry'd left it. He'd gotten a big flashlight from the consul, and now he switched it on.

"There's the good old green line," he said to Selma, pointing to the tracing of his crayon along the left-hand wall.

"I see—but what a horrible place, Jerry!" gasped the girl. "I never thought it would be like this! What a smell!"

"This place has been dead a long time, I guess; it smells that way," Jerry remarked. "Better let me go first. Here's the turn."

They came quickly to the second turn, and so to the place where the passage lost itself in the great central chamber.

Jerry flashed the powerful beam of his

light about the great cavern. It reached the jagged rocks of the roof only in spots. Elsewhere cavernous emptiness was above them as far as eye could reach.

"This must be a natural cave in the hill behind the church," Jerry remarked. "The old-timers started with this and little by little dug their passages out from it."

"That's right," agreed Selma. "This was probably their chapel and general place of assembly."

"Uh-huh. This way now——" They moved carefully, past door after door, till they came to the corner. Jerry kept the beam of the light playing along the wall for the most part. He didn't want Selma to be suddenly confronted with a grinning skull.

Here was the corner; and here the opening to a passage, right in the very corner itself.

"Jerry! Do you suppose——"

The girl was incoherent with suspense and excitement.

"Take it easy, Selma. We'll soon know."

The corner passage was a little wider and higher than the one leading from the crypt to the central cavern. Also, it had branch passages turning off here and there; but the main passage ran straight and was easy to follow. Jerry kept flashing his torch-beam from side to side, observing the walls, watching for anything of interest.

Twice they passed recesses in which were openings sealed up by slabs of stone, secured by cement crumbling with age.

"Loculi," said Selma. "Tombs, you know. Look at those Latin inscriptions. '*Caius Sertorius, aetat XXV, fil. Julius Sertorius Aegyptianus*'—— that's the son of a big man, Jerry. Buried down here because he turned Christian, probably."

On went the passage. They were both breathing heavily; Jerry's head ached dully. Bad air, getting no better fast.

"I feel sort of faint, Jerry," said Selma. He stopped to let her rest, flashing the torch about.

"Selma!" The torch had come to rest on the wall ahead of them. Ahead—for there the passage ended in a blank face of rock.

And on that stone surface was carved the looped cross—the ankh!

Bad air and headaches forgotten, they leaped forward together.

The end of the passage—but at one side was a loculus,—open.

The slab which had closed it lay on the floor of the passage, surrounded by a scattering of cement fragments and broken stone.

The recess itself, a cavity some six feet long and three high and deep, hewn in the solid rock, yawned wide—

And empty.

Empty—save for another looped cross carved in the rock at its end.

If this had been the hiding place of the treasure of Orestes, the treasure was gone!

How long since, Heaven alone knew. Christian mob, vandal Arab, Mameluke or Turk, some looting hussar of Napoleon's or a lucky British Tommy—who had taken this treasure and in what year of Egypt's tumultuous history? There was no way to tell.

"It's gone, Selma." Despair was in Jerry's voice as he dropped the ray of his torch to search the floor for some possible forgotten jewel—he jumped.

"Good God!" He was staring at the stone slab. In half-a-dozen places round its edge, clear and white against the gray stone, were the marks of a crowbar.

New marks—made not more than an hour or so ago!

Then from the darkness of the passage, back the way they had come, a cold voice spoke out sharply:

"Hands up! Both of you! Quick, or we'll shoot you down where you stand!"

CHAPTER VIII

SHOWDOWN !



TWO torch-rays blinded Jerry and Selma as they whirled in horror.

Slowly Jerry raised his hands. Not with his own safety in mind, but Selma's.

Vakhuz had been quicker, slicker than Jerry had supposed. He'd come back, located the treasure—he'd been in here

when Jerry and the girl arrived, and had laid a trap for them. Hiding in one of the side passages of course. That damned lying cop!

Jerry's torch, which had dropped to the ground as he raised his hands, was still burning. It sent a path of radiance along the floor of the passage. Jerry could see the legs of two men, standing side by side—and behind them a third pair of legs, straddling some dark object.

Their torch-rays dropped; blinking, peering, Jerry made out a dull yellow gleam, the bright flash of a jewel or two—that dark object was the casket! The treasure!

"Miss Crane!" ordered the cold voice of Vakhuz Bey. "Lower your hands, but be very careful not to make a false move. Take your friend's pistol out of his pocket and lay it on the ground."

Selma countered that order with a question, woman-like:

"What are you going to do with us?"

"All in good time, my dear. I've rather taken a fancy to you myself!" said Vakhuz with his evil laugh. "Now do what I tell you—quick!"

This Vakhuz!—the yellow-bellied skunk—better Selma were dead—

"Selma!" Jerry muttered from the corner of his mouth. "Take the gun—then drop flat on the ground and start shooting!"

"Right!" said the girl softly. And Jerry knew her courage would not fail.

He could feel her hand fumbling at his hip. He leaned a little forward—so that she could get at the gun easier, and so that his coat would swing open.

"Look, my good Benjamin, at the great American detective!" mocked Vakhuz. "His hands in the air, a woman taking his weapon!"

"Arh, he's just an agency dick!" said Benjamin's snarling voice.

The gun was out—in Selma's hand—

"Down!" barked Jerry, and flung himself flat on the stone floor of the passage.

As he did so, his right hand flashed inside his coat, grabbed the gun under his armpit, and flung it forward. His

finger had tightened on the trigger before his body hit the stone.

The narrow passage echoed deafeningly with the crash of the shot.

Bam-bam—two shots from Selma, lying at his side with both slender hands gripping the butt of her gun.

The enemy were firing too, bright flashes and the crash of firing seemed to fill the world with flaming clangor. Bullets were slamming into the soft rock. Jerry had a confused impression that the enemy had switched off their lights. He was firing as fast as he could pull trigger—

"Come back here, ya double-crossin'——!"

Benjamin's voice, ringing through the passage, mingling with the sound of fast-retreating footsteps.

Jerry realized that his own torch still burned on the floor, aimed down the passage. Its path of light showed him one man kneeling, one writhing on the stone—the dark object, the legs of the third man had vanished.

The kneeling man, turning, fired a shot down the passage. At that moment the light flickered, died to a saffron glow-worm, and went out, leaving them all in Stygian blackness.

Softly Jerry spoke:

"Selma!"

"Yes, Jerry?" A steady whisper, not even breathless—calm and brave.

"You all right, Selma?"

"Yes, Jerry!"

Bang! A bullet whizzed between them, thudded into the rock.

Jerry fired instantly at the flash, and rolled toward Selma, pushing her aside. But there was no answering shot.

After a moment, through the echoes of the firing came a low groan.

"Trying to play possum," thought Jerry, and lay very still indeed.

Another groan. Jerry's head was dizzy. The bad air, vitiated by powder-fumes, was almost unbreathable. If they didn't get out of here mighty quick, they were done for.

"Lie quiet, Selma," warned Jerry, and began wriggling forward along the hard floor.

A third groan guided his progress. His outstretched hand touched something—a hat—a round hat—a fez! Then hair into which warm blood was slowly seeping; a head that moved loosely under Jerry's hand.

This man was out, maybe dead. And one had fled. One remained—Benjamin probably—venomous as a cobra. He was somewhere there in the darkness, perhaps waiting with gun or knife ready.

Again that groan; close at hand.

Jerry felt a tightening in his throat; knew that in another five seconds at the latest he would have to cough. If Benjamin were playing a waiting game, groaning as a lure, a cough would mean death. Better gain the advantage of surprise while he had the chance.

His little fountain-pen light wouldn't do so well. He slipped an exploring hand over the limp body beside which he crouched; found a shoulder, an arm, a wrist—a hand. Empty. He groped on the floor beside it in widening circles. Lights dancing before his eyes, the blood pounding heavily in his temples, his brain reeling, he groped silently in that foul darkness.

His fingers struck something—a cylinder, heavy and metallic. He could barely force himself to pick it up. It was a flashlight. Poising his gun, ready for anything, he jammed his thumb down on the switch.

Light leaped dazzlingly across the passage, shone full in the face of a man who lay prostrate against the farther wall. A man who stirred and cursed feebly as the beam smote his eyes. Benjamin, wounded and helpless.

Jerry Lang crouched between his fallen foes and coughed and coughed.

SELMA came crawling to him.

"They're dead, Jerry?" Her voice shook with the horror of it.

He managed to check his coughing a little:

"Let's have a look. Vakhuz first—head wound, but it's just a graze. Knocked him out. Whoa! He's all blood down here—got one through the shoulder, too. He was on *your* side,

Selma—that's good shooting. Let's see you, Benjamin. Where you hurt?"

"Go to hell, louse!" muttered Benjamin pleasantly, and coughed blood for his pains.

"Lung shot. He won't last long," Jerry opined. "Smashed knee, too. 'Fraid you're done for, Benjamin."

Benjamin didn't answer. His opaque black eyes, oddly like those of a serpent, stared at Jerry with the unquenchable hatred of the hunted for the hunter.

"I've got all the guns, I think," said Jerry, making one last survey of the battle-scene. "Come on, Selma—we'll be getting out of here."

"Aren't you going to do anything for—them?" Womanly pity was coming forward now the fight was over.

"Best thing I can do is to get outside and send help in after 'em," Jerry replied. "They won't stifle—there's better air near the floor. Come on."

As they hurried along the passage at the best speed they could make, Jerry spoke again:

"The treasure, Selma, the casket—I saw it on the floor. The third man, whoever he was, ran away with it. Thought it was a good chance while his pals were busy!"

"Honor among thieves—" muttered Selma.

"There's no such thing!" Jerry exclaimed. "Most crooks are rats that'd double-cross themselves if they knew how."

"Anyway, the—the treasure's gone," said Selma in a flat voice.

They were in the central chamber now. Jerry located the outward passage and steered Selma through it into the crypt before he replied.

"It's gone," he said between his teeth, "but I'll get it back! I think I know where to look."

In the light of the lamps at the bottom of the stairs the Egyptian policeman stared at the apparitions that came toward him out of the gloom of the crypt. A woman, staggering with fatigue and bad air, her once-white dress earth-stained and ripped. A man, spotted with the blood of his foes, hatless, dishevelled, but terribly grim of mouth—

"You lying blank-blank!" barked Jerry suddenly. His fist shot out, and the policeman had the impression that the church-tower had fallen on him.

He had hardly hit the floor when Superintendent Stafford, followed by two Egyptian detectives, came clattering down the stairs.

"What the devil—" he began, but Jerry interrupted him:

"Your cop lied to me. He let Vakhuz and Benjamin and some other guy in there. See anybody going out?"

"Man in a burnous, carrying something—box or bundle—thought it was some native——"

"That was the treasure!" exclaimed Jerry, and lurched toward the stairs.

As he moved, Selma Crane gave a little moan, staggered and started to fall. Jerry whirled and caught her. Blood was soaking her sleeve.

"Hell! She's got a bullet in her arm—and the game little kid never said a word!" He let her down gently, tore away the sleeve. "Just a flesh wound, though. That's not arterial blood."

One of the detectives had already produced a first-aid and was setting to work in practised style. Selma'd be O. K.

Jerry jumped up—he could do no more for Selma than was being done, and he had a job before him.

Out came a stub of pencil and an old envelope.

"Here, Super—follow this plan—right turn to the corner, then straight in, see? You'll find Vakhuz and Benjamin. Both wounded, both alive. Get 'em out quick, the air's fierce in there. Then get Selma to a hospital, get the Consul, and come to that house on the Street of a Hundred Demons. Will you?"

"But why—" began the Superintendent, his methodical British mind groping for the answer to all this.

"No time to argue. For God's sake do what I tell you!"

Jerry stooped swiftly, kissed Selma, and was off up the stairs.

Through the church, out, down the steps, along the street at the double—a cab was what he needed. There was one, rounding the corner.

"Hi, cabby!"

Speed now, speed. Faster, cabby! Pull up here a second, here's a hardware store.

He was in and out again in a moment. Go ahead, cabby—a pound if you make it in ten minutes. To hell with the police—I'll fix 'em. Faster! Here's the little square—and here the street, with another carriage already waiting, its driver dozing on his box.

Jerry jumped down before the house of the Priest of Hathor, paid his cabby, and was at the door in one leap.

His hand was on the heavy knocker when he realized that the small postern door was ajar.

Cautiously he pushed it open and stepped within.

There was the great hall, just as he had seen it last. No sign of confusion. No one about. If there was a police guard, he was keeping himself out of the way.

Jerry started along the hall, every sense alert.

At that moment a man came hurrying down the main staircase, a big traveling bag in each hand.

It was Charken.

Jerry gave him a cheerful greeting.

"Come back for your grips, I see, Mr. Charken," he remarked.

"Yes," said Charken. "And even in daylight I don't like this house. When I think of the rental they ask me for it—ai! I should be seeing you at the hotel, Mr. Lang?"

He was starting for the door.

"Just a second, Charken," begged Jerry. "I've been trying to get a word with you, but I've been so darn busy all morning— Step out into the garden with me, won't you? God knows who's listening behind those curtains."

Charken grunted.

"You couldn't wait? I don't like this place, like I said——"

"It's really important, Mr. Charken," insisted Jerry.

"All right, all right." Charken came along with ill-grace, still lugging his bags. A thrifty soul, he didn't want to leave them unguarded in this house of mystery.

THEY passed through the salon, where Mersegret still coiled horribly above the empty table, and out into the sunshine of the walled garden.

Charken set his bags down on the gravelled path.

"Well, Mr. Lang?" he asked.

"Mr. Charken," said Jerry. "I've been wondering about one or two points that you can clear up for me. Of course we've got the rug. That much is done. But there are other things——"

Quite naturally he had turned and started to stroll along the path; Charken was keeping pace with him. They paused by the brink of the fountain, under the mocking smile of Hathor.

Jerry gestured toward the rustic chair.

"Sit down, Mr. Charken," he invited.

"Take it easy while I run off at the mouth."

Charken shook his head, a look of horror overspreading his face.

"Sit down where the Professor died?"

In that chair?" he exclaimed. "I should say I wouldn't! I——"

Jerry grabbed the little man suddenly by the shoulders.

"When I say sit down," he barked.

"I mean—sit down!"

He flung Charken into the chair as he might a sack of meal.

The garden rang with one scream of awful terror.

A scream that was choked in Charken's throat——

For as he hit the chair two of the rustic branches at the back of the thing closed suddenly around his throat in a vise-like grip.

They held him fast, throttling him, while the rest of the chair closed upon his body more slowly, in horrible inexorable silence.

The thing was—alive.

Its arms, stout limbs as thick as a man's ankle, developed a dreadful flexibility; they wound themselves about Charken's body, pinning his arms to his side. Other branches lifted themselves from the seat and sides, gripping thigh or shoulder or waist. The whole chair was moving, and every move tightened its terrible grip on Charken.

Whatever Jerry had expected to see,

and he had come very near guessing the secret of the chair, the horror of the reality held him spellbound. So quick—so quick and terrible and deadly!

Charken's face was already turning purple; blood was starting from his nose and mouth, his eyes protruded from beneath their lids. The limbs of the chair writhed and tightened and wrapped themselves closer. A bone cracked—

The sound seemed to restore to Jerry the power of movement.

He snatched from his pocket the keen little camping-axe he had bought in the hardware store against this very situation, and leaped at the writhing chair.

No blows did he waste on the cruel limbs that were crushing the life from Charken's body; instead, flinging himself on his knees, he began to chop away on the trunk below, where it grew out of the ground beneath the seat of the chair.

It was, in fact, not a chair at all but a tree—a frightful, living tree, trained through countless years to grow in the form of a chair.

Chop — chop — snick — chop — the bright blade tore into the trunk that gave the grisly thing life. Dark red sap, horribly like blood, oozed from the gaping wound where the axe bit deep.

With furious energy Jerry chopped. Were the limbs relaxing? Or would the tree-chair claim one more victim before it died?

Chop—chop! The red chips flew. *Chop—chop.* One of the side limbs fell suddenly away. *Chop—chop—* they were dropping back from Charken, those dreadful branches, leaving him lying there, white and unconscious. The whole tree sagged to one side as the mutilated trunk broke under Charken's weight.

Jerry stopped chopping, picked Charken bodily out of the seat of death and laid him on a bit of greensward. No ribs broken yet, as far as Jerry could tell, but the left forearm was snapped—it swung limply as Jerry handled it.

The pain, and brandy from Jerry's pocket-flask forced between his white lips, brought Charken to with a groan.

He opened his eyes, saw Jerry and screamed again.

Horror left Jerry's heart, driven out by a cold fury. In that hell-chair the poor old Professor had died.

Jerry propped Charken in a sitting position against the fountain and gave him another drink.

Charken coughed, cowered, shuddered—

"You had a narrow squeak of it, Charken," said Jerry grimly. "Lucky you didn't go the way you sent the Professor, you louse!"

"I didn't—no—" whined Charken, between long shuddering breaths.

"Don't you lie to me!" snapped Jerry. "I've got the goods on you, Charken! You're Egyptian by birth, aren't you?"

Charken, utterly cowed, broken by pain and fright, nodded.

"And this Vakhuz Bey's a friend o' yours, isn't he? An old pal?"

Again Charken nodded.

Jerry jerked a crumpled cable-form from his pocket and stuck it under Charken's nose.

"I had a hunch to wire my office about you," he said. "Here's the dope they got. You're not the sole owner of your business, are you?"

Charken's pallor went from white to a dirty green.

"No—no—not exactly——"

"You know you're not! You have two partners—good, solid, respectable business men that were induced to invest their money in the firm and leave you to run it—you with your one-third interest and your big front!" Jerry was hammering home his points mercilessly. "You and your pal Benjamin've been looting the business for months and losing the dough in the stock market. Haven't you?"

Some of this last was a guess; Jerry's cable only told him of Charken's and Benjamin's nationality, Charken's partners in the business, and his activity in the Street. But it was a shrewd guess:

"You're—the devil," muttered Charken.

"Now I'll tell you some more!" went on the inexorable Jerry. "You were

suspicious because Professor Crane was so interested in that rug. You looked him up, found he was a famous Egyptologist. You cabled your friend Vakhuz a description of the rug, and after he'd looked up the Museum records, he decided it must be the rug of Orestes. You didn't want to let your partners in on the treasure. But you'd boosted the price so high in your attempt to hold up the Professor, that you couldn't afford to buy the thing in yourself; so you hatched up a scheme by which Benjamin was to pretend to steal it and was to take it to Egypt. Then you'd collect from the surety company, for which purpose you falsified the bill of sale to make the value of the rug fifty thousand—that's forgery, Charken!—and afterwards you'd get your cut of the treasure, if any. Oh, you had a fine scheme—you collected coming and going, and no risk. Am I right so far?"

Charken could only swallow and nod.

"You had to do something—the first inquiry would show you up for the thief you were, unless you got some important money soon. Sing Sing was all ready for you, Charken," Jerry went on. "This treasure business was just like manna from heaven, wasn't it?"

"I—er—yes!" admitted Charken meekly.

"But it didn't occur to you, Charken, that surety companies don't pay out fifty thousand dollars without investigation, did it?" Jerry continued. "They sent me over to Egypt on Benjamin's trail, with the idea of getting back the rug for you if possible—as the cheapest way out. When you found they were sending a dick over, you came along—scared of what might happen, wanting to warn your pals, maybe scared that they'd gyp you. You knew all about this house, this old fake priest, this chair—didn't you?"

"I knew," said Charken. "But I—swear to God—I didn't——"

"You knew!" interrupted Jerry sternly. "And when you got here and got in touch with your pals, you found their worst worry was that the Professor would get his permit, start to work, and find the treasure before your old priest

could solve the secret of the rug.

"Then everything happened at once. The old boy solved the problem, by using his bean and maybe his knowledge of the catacomb layout. The Professor, warned off by your pal Vakhuz, got his permit the same night. You were the first to learn of that—it made you change your mind about taking him to 'your house'—God forgive me for that suggestion. I played right into your hands there.

"Your crowd was afraid to murder him outright, by knife or gun, unless you had to; but this chair was different. Who could prove how he had come to his end? Or if they did, who could prove it was by design? Moreover, you depended on your local cops to stand in—there was money enough for everybody this time, and you could all quit and leave the country if you made the grade. You heard his daughter tell about the old man's desire for his hour with the stars, and there you were! *That's the truth, Charken—isn't it?*"

Charken gulped and nodded.

"Ye-yes," he admitted. "But I didn't want to kill the poor old feller—I only wanted to kidnap him. I—it was the old priest insisted on killing him. I swear it."

"You'll swing for it just the same," Jerry said in chill, implacable tones.

Charken choked, whined a little with pain as he moved; but he got his good arm on the edge of the fountain and lifted himself to his feet.

"Swing!" he muttered, swaying on his feet. "No—no! Lang, you're a poor man. You want to be rich? Open that bag—the nearest one. Look."

JERRY went to the bag—a stout Gladstone—released straps and catches, and pulled the mouth of the bag open. Inside was something wrapped in brown cloth; a bulky object that completely filled the bag.

He lifted it out; it was heavy, very heavy. Off with the wrapping—so!

A metal casket, tarnished with age but with gold and inset jewels gleaming here and there even yet. A beautiful thing it would be when it was cleaned:

"look at the Egyptian carvings, the eagles and the looped cross of life, the figures of men and women——"

"Ran off with the swag when the trouble started, didn't you? True to form, louse!" said Jerry.

Charken ignored his insults.

"Open it!" he begged. "Open and look inside!"

The lock had already been forced—probably by the gang when they first found it. Jerry lifted the lid back on reluctant hinges.

The rags in which the various objects had been wrapped had long since rotted into dust. The damp of the catacombs, creeping in through crevice and crack, had turned the gold and silver settings a uniform dull black. But staring up at him from the center of a gold brooch on top of the piled ornaments in that casket was a red stone as big as a hen's egg: an enormous ruby flashing in the sunlight. No damp could dull *that* lustre. Alone it must be worth a king's ransom. And there were others—a pair of diamonds set in a figure of Isis, a great emerald as the tip of a scepter carved with hieroglyphs, four rubies blazing round a central diamond in a gold disc representing Aton the Sun-God. And more below—What a treasure!

Charken, leaning forward, could see too. His mouth was slobbering with greed and excitement.

"Half is yours, Lang! Half's yours! You're rich for life. Take it and help me out o' here!"

So cried Charken, sure that no "dick" could refuse so magnificent a bribe. But he didn't know that Jerry Lang was in love.

"You go to hell!" said Jerry, slamming down the lid upon temptation. "Half of that junk belongs to the Egyptian Museum—and the other half's Selma Crane's. It's gonna make her dad a big name; give him a brass plate over the showcase they'll put it in. Get me?"

"A brass plate?" groaned Charken. "Ai, for a million dollars he buys a brass plate! I'm going mad!"

"You're going to jail first!" said a new voice.

Through the French window stepped

the American Consul, his usually kindly face set in stern, hard lines. Behind him came Superintendent Stafford, and leaning on his arm, her own left arm in a sling, was Selma Crane.

"Did you think I wouldn't be in at the death, Jerry?" she said with a wan smile.

"I've heard the whole confession," the Consul announced. "We've all been listening outside—ever since you pulled out that cablegram, Lang. Charken, you're under arrest. And I take formal possession of this treasure, in the name of the United States Government, on behalf of Miss Selma Crane as her father's heir-at-law. Any objections, Stafford?"

The Superintendent shook his head.

"None," he said. "Law's on your side, old chap. What's this chair business, Mr. Lang?"

He was looking with professional interest at the chair, the axe, the red-stained chips.

Jerry explained what had happened.

"I didn't think it would grab him so quick," he said. "I found that trunk last night; it checked up with what Herr Oberwalden told me about the old-time punishment for sacrilege. Seems as though this species of tree has been known to the Egyptians for centuries, and in the old days was sometimes used to punish persons found guilty of robbing tombs. It's supposed to be—" he referred to his notebook—"under the special protection of the goddess Hathor—that's the stone lady there. It's constricting grip is the grip of the snake Mersegret, one of her forms. The species is not known to modern botanists, says Oberwalden, but it is related to the well-known mimosa, which has the habit of closing its leaves and stems tightly when touched by any object. After a little while it relaxes and goes back to its normal position—just as the mimosa does—and then it's sort of shot its wad. Won't close up again for a couple of hours, more or less. That's why I didn't tumble to it at first; thought it was solid as a rock. That's a hell of a tree; Oberwalden says here that it's related to the 'man-eating tree' of Mada-

gascar, which has been seen by European travelers."

"Then—the horrible thing was really alive?" gasped the Consul.

Selma had turned away. Her shoulders were shaking with sobs.

Jerry nodded.

"You'd have thought so," he said in a voice too low to reach the girl, "if you'd've seen it squeezing Charken there. Eh, Charken?"

Charken trembled all over, but didn't answer.

"Rather rough and ready method of getting evidence!" grinned the Superintendent. "Wish they'd let us do the same. What you Americans call the third degree, eh?"

"Yep—with Egyptian variations," smiled Jerry.

"Fine bit of police work you've done, though, old chap," the Superintendent went on. "Looks as though you'd cleared up all these other killings. Too bad we couldn't lay hands on old Kallikrates—hope he's in hell now. What tipped you off to this Charken fellow?"

"The permit," said Jerry. "He was the one person who'd been alone with the Professor's body and had had a chance to steal it. His changing his mind so quick about taking the Professor to the house, when he heard of the permit, had been sticking in my craw all evening. Then that permit vanished. Checking out the Sudanese, who could have taken it but Charken? That's why I sent that cablegram. The answer showed me the whole picture. Add a coupla lucky guesses, and there you are!"

"Stout fella!" approved Stafford. "And how'd you catch him here?"

"I knew he was the third man, down there in the catacombs just now—the one who made off with the swag. I recognized those trick shoes o' his. I thought to myself, if I were Charken, what would I do with a golden casket as big as that in the streets of Alexandria? I'd get a bag to put it in, of course. Then I remembered Charken's bags were still here—and here I came. I got the third degree idea on the way, stopped, and bought me that axe. Which was lucky for brother Charken."

"I'll say!" interjected the Consul.

"My arm's broke. I want a doctor," whined Charken.

"You'll have plenty of time to worry about that in Sing Sing," growled the Consul.

"In Sing Sing?" exclaimed Jerry. "Hey! Won't they hang him here in Egypt for the murder of Professor Crane?"

The Consul shook his head.

"He'd have to be tried in a special Consular court before the Consul-General at Cairo, since I'm a witness in the matter," he replied. "And even if he could be convicted, which is doubtful, he could only be remanded to an Egyptian prison to await execution—a prison from which Vakhuz Bey's friends would have him out in no time. No—Sing Sing's the place for him. We've got enough charges to keep him there quite a while."

Charken seemed to prick up his ears. Sing Sing didn't sound half bad to a man in the shadow of the gallows.

"Benjamin's dead," the Consul went on, "so his evidence isn't available. And Vakhuz Bey, refusing to talk, has already applied to his friends in Cairo for help. Better let the New York courts deal with friend Charken."

Jerry didn't like the idea. Didn't like it at all.

This dirty snake of a Charken had cooked up the whole mess; more than anyone else he was directly responsible for the Professor's death. And he was getting off with a prison term for forgery and embezzlement! No justice in that.

Charken was even assuming a self-satisfied smirk, despite the pain in his arm.

"Anyway, I didn't have nothing to do with the murder," he announced. "It was all the old feller—the baldhead guy."

"Liar!" snarled a terrible voice. "Traitor!"

Selma cried out sharply: her eyes were suddenly fixed on the fountain.

Jerry spun round.

The statue of Hathor was moving!

It was turning on its basalt pedestal: turning slowly, inexorably, revealing

a great hole in the top of the pedestal.

And from that hole there arose a terrible figure.

It was an emaciated, bald-headed old man, naked save for a loin cloth and a rag of bandage round his neck, covered with dried blood from head to foot—but with his terrible red eyes blazing with infernal fires from the tight-drawn mask of his cruel face.

Those eyes were fixed upon Charken.

It was Kallikrates—he who called himself the Priest of Hathor! In what underground hiding-place had he lain all day, nursing his hurt like a wounded tiger?

Charken had turned too. He cried out with terror, but move he could not. It was as though he were rooted to the spot by the malignant eyes of a serpent.

"Traitor!" croaked the old man again. "You—to steal the treasure for yourself! You—to pin murder on your comrades by your lies! You—to escape then through the wide meshes of the law's net! Never, by Hathor's womb! Die, traitor!"

His arm shot out with incredible suddenness—a flash, a cry, and Charken staggered forward, his one sound hand tugging at the haft of the dagger which had pierced his heart.

"He will trouble your law no more, Roumi dogs!" snarled the terrible old priest. "I threw to kill this time!" Jerry suddenly remembered the little knife that had scratched him in the hotel.

Charken collapsed face downward

into the fountain, twitched and lay still

Stafford started forward to seize the murderer, but there was no need. The effort of throwing the knife had reopened the wound in his throat. Bright red blood spurted forth in a scarlet fountain; he swayed and pitched forward into the basin below, to lie beside his victim, their blood commingling in a common pool.

Jerry Lang suddenly discovered he was holding someone in his arms. Someone who was sobbing again, trembling with horror, and clinging to him very tightly.

"Selma!" said Jerry. "Selma! There, honey. There. It's all right. Don't cry any more."

"Take me away," moaned Selma. "Take me away from this horrible place, Jerry. Take me—home."

The Consul and the Superintendent of Police looked at each other as Jerry half led, half carried Selma out of that garden of horror forever.

"Bet he's figuring right now on how he can support a wife on his salary," said the Consul.

The Superintendent smiled his superior British smile:

"He'll feel better," he chuckled, "when I tell him about the Recovery of Stolen Antiquities Act. He's entitled to ten per cent of the appraised value of the Royal Museum's share of that treasure, in hard cash from the Egyptian Treasury, for recovering it after it had been stolen. Nice little nest-egg, what?"

NEXT MONTH

Inspector Gobbelin of Scotland Yard tackles
an eerie, gripping, crime-mystery of INDIA—

THE STRANGE CASE

—OF THE—

SERPENT'S TOMB

MAY SCOTLAND YARD on sale

APRIL FOURTH

Stop Thief!

BY
INAZEL CROWLEY FOSTER



1.

I'D JUST got back from a long, hard trip,
And there found orders to start once more
For a distant town; I packed my grip,
Changed clothes in a hurry, and made for the door.

2.

A TRAVELING salesman must not fail
When a prospect waits in a distant place!
So I drove all night, and made my sale,
Then started for home, a grin on my face.

3.

IT WAS rather lonely, through wood and dell;
I was glad when a fellow asked to ride,
And we chatted awhile; then a silence fell,
While I studied the stranger by my side.

4.

HOLD-UPS and murders, such mishaps
Took place in this region, near and far;
—Was he a robber? Hard-boiled chaps
Sought for rides, just to steal your car!

5.

BUT I was prepared for the like, you see!
There was a pistol in my belt;
—The fellow was watching me furtively—
Had he robbed me yet? For my watch I felt.

7.

HE forked it over without a word,
And he ran like a deer, with no backward
glance.
—I felt pretty clever, till, home once more,
I found my watch in my other pants!

6.

IT WAS gone! I shook with a sudden chill,
But I hissed, my gun in his sneakin' side,
"You gimme that watch! Then hit for that hill—
Don't stop! Or I'll puncture your worthless
hide!"





An INSIDE JOB

No bills were short—and yet a golden stream was leaking from the Treasury! . . . Another page from the notebook of Ace Lakelund, star Secret Service man.



IT'S trite—but it's true. In this detective trade, more than anywhere else, it's the little things you have to watch.

Not many crooks leave a trail like balloon tires on a dirt road. That kind get stopped at the start.

The "big shots" wouldn't leave any trail at all, except for a moment's carelessness, or a bit of bravado—picking the wrong time to fall in love, or some such slip.

Take that bum-bill case we've just finished. If Della Werner hadn't got

a crush on a spring hat—hadn't been impatient to make it sit just right on her head—well, her mob would have got away with enough of Uncle Sam's cash to buy a yacht. Just the little matter of jerking too hard at the spring bonnet, or we might have given that crowd a clean bill of health for another year, at least.

It was Sammy Potter, my cub understudy, you know, who really turned the trick. Sam has a flare for sizing up women and when they told us to watch Miss April Gay, I watched what she did. But Sammy—Sammy watched what she was!

"She's scared, Ace; scared to death!" Sam kept telling me. And that's why I didn't show long ears by reporting "no case."

Scared! Well, the poor kid had reason enough. But let's get back to the start.

Sam and I were down in Maryland on the Grimes counterfeiting case when the chief pulled us off.

The chief was worried.

"Ace, there's nothing to pin on this girl, April Gay," he said. "But we've put two and two together and it seems to make about five."

"Miss Gay has been in the Treasury Department eight years. She's quiet, refined, and pretty. Her habits are exemplary, so far as we can learn. She started as a file clerk, at twelve dollars a week. Now she's working in the currency redemption division, getting twenty-five dollars. She counts and checks old bills."

He didn't have to give much detail there, as I knew pretty well what the job was. You know the banks all over the country constantly send in old, worn out, or badly mutilated bills. The Treasury takes them and issues new ones to the banks in their place. Eventually the old bills are destroyed. They're ground into pulp—you've seen those imitation Washington monuments made from the pulp of five hundred dollar bills.

"This girl is the third person to count those bills," the chief went on. "Two persons count them before she gets them and two persons count them after she gets them. There's where we hit a blank wall. How could she take a bill without it's being missed? Not a single bill has been missed from any package she's handled."

"Besides, two of our women operatives searched her three times in the last two weeks and found nothing."

My face must have shown a question for he added:

"Oh, they gave her a pretty likely story about some papers of importance being missing from the division and of course, they searched some of the others. I don't think it was enough to scare her

off. The point is, they took her along just as she was leaving her office, gave her a thorough search without result."

He paused, and I suggested: "So now what's the two and two that make five, chief?"

"Ever hear of Tony Maida?"

I nodded. Tony was a gambler and—while the police couldn't seem to hang it on him—a racketeer. He had several rackets and bossed a gang of thugs with connections in Detroit, Philadelphia and several other cities, or so they suspected. He was known to be a killer, too; bad guy all around. But he was slick. Every time they got him, there were alibis, smart shyster lawyers and witnesses who jumped town.

"Tony," the chief continued, "was pinched the other night and held for a couple of hours—until he got a bond fixed—on a conspiracy-to-murder charge. One of his boys took a shot at a Greek fruit-stand owner who hadn't been paying off. While they had him at the station the city men frisked him and found this."

He tossed a folded sheet of cheap note paper on the desk. It bore in neat, fine handwriting, these words:

"Got \$1000 from April today."

The chief went on: "One of our boys—Williams—happened to be at the station and heard Tony's lawyer phoning to some one he called 'April' about money for Tony's bond. Then he remembered that he'd heard of an 'April Gay' in the Treasury Department. The name 'April' is unusual, of course. He did some quick work and got out to the girl's house just in time to see her leaving. He followed her and she went straight to this lawyer's office. So this two and two does make about five, doesn't it?"

"About seven, I'd say," was my comment.

He gave me a little more about April Gay and her job, then Sammy and I got busy. The chief had had two holes bored in the floor of an unused room above the girl's office.

Sammy and I were soon lying on our stomachs on the floor, with our eyes at those peepholes.

I T WAS easy to recognize the girl by descriptions we had. She was pretty, plenty pretty. Red hair, a clear, fair complexion; delicate, regular features. She was about five feet eight, and slender. She held herself erect as she sat at her desk. Her clothes were nice, too. I'm no style judge, but they were neat and becoming.

Sammy summed it up after we'd been there a couple of minutes:

"She's a classy sort of a gal, Ace," the youngster confided.

"Looks it, anyhow," I returned. "Has nimble fingers, Sam; bear that in mind."

The girl was opening big yellow manila envelopes, taking out batches of bills, sorting them, making notations in a good-sized ledger, putting them into new envelopes, and passing them along to another counter for the next check. Her fingers moved with swift, graceful precision.

The room had several desks, some occupied by men, some by women.

"Sam, I'd sort of like to see the color of her eyes," I said with a grin, after we had watched for a while without discovering anything apparently worthy of note.

"Little character reading, eh?" Sammy asked with a touch of banter.

"All of that," I answered dryly.

I'm not too strong on the theory you can tell crooks by looking at them. Lots of crooks look straight and some straight folks look like crooks. Still, sometimes you'll get an idea from the flicker of an eyelash when you're talking with a suspect.

We went down and talked to the chief of the division she worked in and he took us into the accounting room and introduced us here and there as cousins of his—just in from Baltimore and eager to see how the Treasury Department wheels went around.

After we'd stalled about in chats with several of the other workers we came to Miss Gay's desk.

She acknowledged the introduction politely, and kept on with her sorting. But I saw her eyes. They were a vivid blue.

For the life of me I couldn't think of any small talk to make, but Sam, who's not as shy of pretty women as I am, asked her a few questions. She answered briefly, giving him a quick glance occasionally, but keeping right on with her work.

After a few moments we drifted on and when we were back in the office of the division superintendent, I asked:

"Get any hunch, Sam?"

"A couple, Ace," Sammy said eagerly. "First, she's a darn fine girl—eighteen-carat. There's class to that dame!"

"Then you don't think——"

"Oh, I'm not saying she isn't up to mischief. But I'll bet my badge someone else is the real thief. Someone's working this thing by remote control—like the radio experts operate an auto or motorboat. My other hunch lines up with that."

"And what is the other hunch?" I asked him.

He paused a moment for dramatic effect. Sam's just a kid, twenty-three, you know.

"It's this; she's scared, Ace; scared to death."

"May have suspected that we were operatives, Sam," I suggested. "In that case, she'd have been upset, whether guilty or not."

The lad shook his head.

"She wasn't merely upset. She had a sort of haunting fear about her face."

I didn't smile at the boy. He's not often so positive in his opinions. What he'd said was worth some thinking. But for the moment we turned away from it to ask the division superintendent a few questions.

"Could this girl smuggle anything out by a second party?" I wanted to know.

"Well, they've searched her associates, too," he reminded me. "Besides, all the other folks in that office have been with us for years and we have complete faith in them. On top of that, nothing's missing. The bills all count up O. K."

When we left him and went back for another session at the peepholes. We

were both feeling pretty much that the chief's two and two might make only four after all, instead of five. But Sam repeated his conviction that the girl was under some extraordinary worry or dread.

We watched through the afternoon until quitting time, but saw nothing that seemed worthy of note. The girl worked steadily and efficiently. Only twice did she halt for a few moments. Both times she got up, went to a cooler in the corner and took a drink.

I gave Sam the job of shadowing her from the office and during the evening, having decided to spend my own time checking up a bit on Tony Maida.

I learned plenty about the unsavory Tony. Two city detectives gave me a long list of things he'd been mixed up in and any one of them, if proved in court, would have sent him to prison. Some of them could have sent him to the chair. He wasn't any of your smooth, soft bosses, Tony. His own gang was scared of his shadow, I learned.

That made me think of Sammy's belief that the girl, April Gay, was under severe strain of terror. But Sam's report the next morning, as we were breakfasting, made it seem improbable that the girl had any real connection with Tony's gang.

"She lives in a little cottage with an aunt, a white-haired little woman, sort of sweet and old-fashioned looking," Sam said. "It's out at 710 — Street, a nice neighborhood of small cottages. She and the aunt went out for a walk after supper; just strolled about. I watched until eleven o'clock, after they returned home, and the girl didn't leave again. I can't figure how a girl traveling with Maida's gang could be living with a sweet little old woman like that aunt, and she probably wouldn't miss many nights stepping out with some sheik in the gang, either."

What he reported lined up exactly with the dope Williams had given the chief. The girl, it seemed, had never been seen to go out at night except with the old lady. Sometimes they went to town to window shop or see a movie; sometimes just strolled about the neighborhood.



WE WATCHED the office through the peepholes nearly all morning and saw nothing that roused our suspicions. I noticed again that Miss Gay possessed a set of mighty nimble fingers, but I didn't believe it would be possible for her to take a bill from a stack and conceal it without being detected by some of the employees about her, at least not more than once in a blue moon.

At lunch I decided to quit watching a while and we spent the next two days in equally fruitless checking up. I was just about ready to tell the chief it would take a smarter man than me to get anything on that girl.

But first I decided to have one try of my own at shadowing her and the aunt. They left their cottage about 7:30 p.m., took a street car and got off in a downtown shopping district. It was Saturday night and most of the stores were open.

After window shopping a while, they went into a millinery shop. I waited close to the door, pretending to read a newspaper. After a few minutes they came out and the little white-haired woman was wearing a new hat.

As I've said, I'm no style expert, but somehow that hat struck me as unsuited to a woman of her age. She was attired in a sort of old-fashioned looking black silk dress, with a high collar and long sleeves. The hat was bright, a sort of purple; a small, snappily-cut model.

The pair stopped in front of a plate mirror set in at one side of a window of the store and the aunt pulled and tugged at the new bonnet. She seemed to be unable to make it sit just like she wanted it.

Then I caught my breath. For she gave that little hat a sudden, quick, impatient yank at one side and as she did so her white hair on that side slipped up a couple of inches. And there was hair underneath of a very different shade! *Coal black hair!*

That was all worth noting that evening but that was plenty. When women make themselves look younger, it's just their nature. But when a woman makes

herself look older—that's disguise!

Sammy and I went to work in earnest next morning. And things began popping. I was talking to the division superintendent again when a girl rushed in to say that Miss April Gay had fainted. They carried her to a lounge in another room where she soon revived and insisted on going back to work, saying that she had been somewhat ill lately, but felt better.

I went to the peephole and watched her. She seemed to have recovered, but went several times to the cooler for a drink.

Once she dropped one of the paper cups on the floor and immediately stooped, picked it up and dropped it into the wire container under the cooler. Most any neat person will do that sort of thing but it seemed to me she did it rather hurriedly—appeared a little flustered. I didn't exactly attach importance to the incident, but it remained in the back of my mind.

Half an hour later Sammy came in all excited. I'd sent him out to watch the house and try to get a low-down on that aunt with the white wig. Sam had rather exceeded the strict rules laid down for our department.

The aunt had gone away and the boy had promptly got in the back door with a pass-key and searched the house. He'd found some very interesting things.

One was a note signed by Tony that said:

"Tell April if she don't come on through and keep her nose clean her old man will wish he was dead. I want two grand by Tuesday."

Then, on a sewing table, Sammy found half a handful of little green and yellow trimmings—trimmings from Uncle Sam's currency; also a batch of the sort of transparent gummed paper that bank tellers use to mend mutilated bills.

I looked at those trimmings and the gummed paper and all of a sudden the wheels in my head began to go around.

Leaving Sammy at the peephole I got the negro porter who cleaned up the floor on which Miss Gay worked and in the superintendent's office I gave him a short and sweet little questioning.

He admitted that for several months he had been saving the used paper cups he was supposed to throw away and giving them to Miss Gay.

"She says she uses that stiff papuh to make little papuh dolls fuh 'n awphun asylum," he explained. "She draps me a quawtuh fuh each batch. I takes 'm by huh house 'cause I goes out on the same street cah line she does; 'n ladies don't like to carry no bundles."

Things were unraveling. We gave him orders to keep his mouth closed, save that day's batch of cups and bring them to the superintendent. Then I went to see my chief to arrange for two of the boys to shadow Tony Maida.

Before I got out of the ante-room into the chief's office I got a call from the superintendent of Miss Gay's division. The girl had got a phone call, had come to him and begged him to go with her at once to the police department, saying that she must see the chief of detectives at once.

He had set out with her to get in his car, parked a couple of blocks from the Treasury Building. Just as they arrived at the car someone blackjacked him from behind. As he lost consciousness he heard the girl scream and when he came to, a few seconds later, she had disappeared.

The Washington police, a small army of Uncle Sam's various agents and operatives, and even some members of the Military Intelligence staff spent the rest of the afternoon in search for the girl.

It had stung the chief and his superiors pretty deeply to think that racketeering had reached its crooked arm right into the strong box of the United States government. Besides, Tony Maida's reputation made the police afraid they might have a mighty nasty murder case to try to solve.

While I was fuming around police headquarters, about seven that night, trying to get some sort of lead to go out on, the superintendent of Miss Gay's division sent over the batch of cups the porter had collected from the girl's office. They were the envelope type of cup, which stays closed flat when not held for use.

We went through them and four of them contained good sized scraps of bank notes. I gave Sam and a couple of detectives who were with us my theory of how the girl worked her little game, which later proved to be correct.

She handled many bills with large pieces missing. So she could tear off pieces, or take pieces already torn off, and conceal them. She probably folded them and put them flat between two fingers. Then she'd go to the cooler, get a drink, and slip the pieces in a cup. There was no danger of their slipping out, as the cup collapsed and was damp, besides.

By diligent work she got a good many pieces each day, from all parts of bills. She selected pieces from large bills, of course. At night she and the "aunt" recut the pieces so that they could fit together a complete bill, using the transparent gummed paper.

Of course, the bills wouldn't have passed without question at a bank. The numbers didn't check up correctly, either. But the girl would take a bill with her to the office occasionally and substitute it for a bill in bad condition, but still passable. Then she'd crumple up this bill, put it in a drinking-cup, just as she had done with the pieces, and thus get it smuggled out. There are lots of well-worn bills floating around, and Tony, with his many connections, had no trouble in getting rid of them.

Just as I was finishing my explanation, a detective-sergeant broke into the room with a hot tip that Tony Maida had been located on the upper floor of an old warehouse, used for liquor storage.

SAM and I squeezed into a short-call car with some of the city men. Sirens whining, we flashed through the streets. It was dark when we reached the neighborhood of the warehouse, an old brick building, standing almost alone in a run-down wholesale district.

There were six carloads of bluecoats and plain clothes men. We split into five squads, one to watch each side of the building, the other to go inside.

Sam and I went with the latter party.

Just as we got to a door at one corner,

the crackle of a machine-gun broke the stillness. It came from the roof. The cops hugged in close to the walls. Two big huskies in our squad broke down the door, and we swarmed into a sort of entry hall, then up two flights of rickety, creaking stairs.

At the top of the second flight there was a door.

Sergeant Fitz, who was leading our group, rapped on it with the butt of his automatic.

"Sheet iron!" he pronounced.

The boys lunged at it several times without budging it an inch. In the meantime, the crackle of that machine-gun sounded from the roof again. A couple of the boys outside had got in range, and one, as we found later, had been drilled in half a dozen places.

Fitz sent two of his men out for a big log or post to use as a battering ram.

They'd been gone only a few seconds when the door suddenly swung back. Instantly there was a volley of pistol shots from within. We could see red flashes and hear bullets whining around. One of our boys, a youngster, got it in the shoulder.

We dropped to the stairs or hugged the walls, and those in front pumped the lead back, but in a few seconds Fitz ordered us downstairs. The odds were too much against us. We hadn't an idea in what direction to fire, there in the darkness. And, as Fitz figured, the gang was behind barricades.

A few minutes after we got down, reinforcements came along with tear bombs and a couple of machine-guns. One of the barkers was mounted on a building nearby and Maida's gunners lost no time getting off the roof.

It was no trick for some of those cops who had grown up in sandlot baseball to throw tear bombs through the third-floor windows of the old warehouse and pretty soon, one by one, Maida's mob began stumbling down the stairways with their hands reaching for the ceiling and their eyes dripping.

But Maida didn't come. After waiting for the worst of the gas to clear out through the shattered windows, Fitz, one of his huskies, Sam and I, stormed

back up the stairs. We had another squad with a machine-gun right at our heels and we had our automatics ready.

No fusilade greeted us that time. We prowled about through four or five rooms and directly Sam sent up a shout.

He'd found April Gay, bound and gagged, lying on an old couch. Luckily she was right by a broken window and the gas hadn't done her much harm, though she was about dead from nerve shock.

Next day we found that Maida had got wind that we knew his gang's hide-out and had skipped just a few seconds before we got there. They got him a couple of weeks later, though, and that time, he wasn't able to slip out.

I'm sure you remember, from the newspapers, how the case wound up. Maida got ten years and Della Werner, who posed as April's aunt, five. Della might have got off lighter, but she had a bad record.

She had been with the Buckner mob in St. Louis before she got in with Maida.

As for April Gay—it was natural that she drew a suspended sentence. You see, her father had been mixed up, a long time before, with Tony. The old man

had gone straight and was holding down a night watchman's job in Baltimore, but Maida and Della made the girl believe they could send him to prison any day they got ready.

The first money she stole from the Treasury was to go, as she thought, to pay a lawyer for him. After that, they held this first offense over her head, as well as her dad's old trouble.

But the strain got unbearable and on the day she was abducted, she went to work after hearing from Della that she had to come across with a large sum in short order. She couldn't stand it. She slipped out and phoned Della that she was through.

Della threatened her and she grew hysterical and said she'd go to the police chief, make a clean breast and ask protection from Tony. Della got Maida by phone and Maida ordered the kidnapping.

She's with her dad now, by the way. Both of them in California, holding good jobs. The superintendent she worked under at the Treasury did that for them. Some of these tight-lipped, cold-looking men in the Treasury have hearts as big as the capitol dome.

*The story you have just read
will be broadcast from YOUR
favorite radio station soon.*

Watch for it!



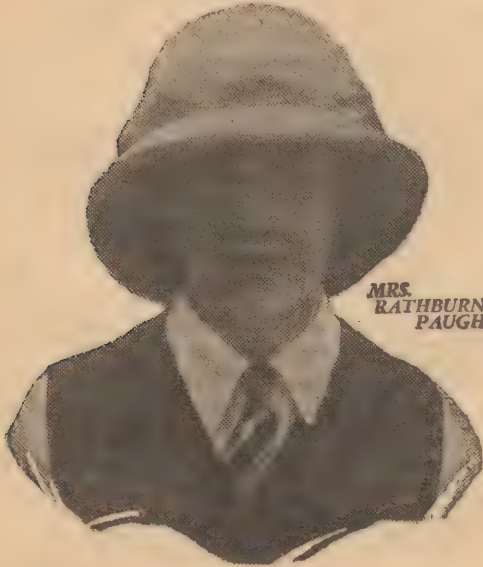
*Over 40 stations in the U. S. and Canada
are now featuring a*

SCOTLAND YARD

radio drama EVERY week!

A Scotland Yard

The FINGERPRINTS



His wife, expecting to hear his cheery welcome, was startled.

"Oh, Rathburn, did you fall?" she called as she ran downstairs.

Reaching the lower floor she found her husband lying on the rug, gasping pitifully in an attempt to get his breath. His face was purple.

A back door closed, but was scarcely noticed at the time.

The young wife screamed as her husband rolled about in paroxysms of agony, clutching at his throat.

There was an excited knocking at the door: "What's the matter there? Let me in! Can I help?"

It was the next door neighbor who entered, a physician, fortunately.

"He's dead! He's dying!" sobbed Dorothy.

The physician bent over the prostrate form, examining the victim of the mysterious attack in his professional way. He lifted Paugh up, and his free hand slid to the wrist as he checked on his heart action.

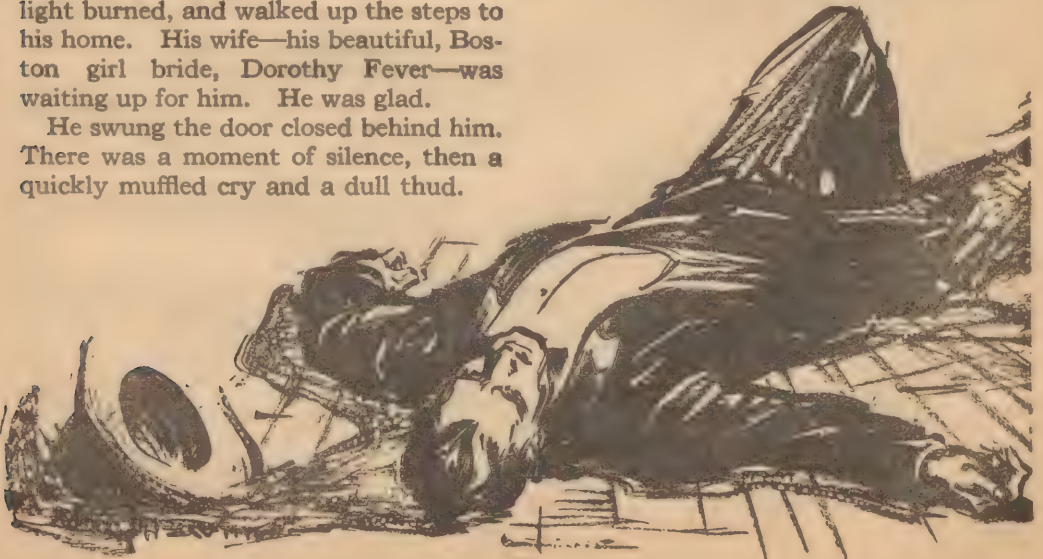
"He'll pull through. He's been choked, but not fatally," said the doctor.



THE London taxi swung around the corner and stopped before an unassuming home in Hounslow.

Rathburn Paugh alighted, paid his fare, glanced at the upper window where a light burned, and walked up the steps to his home. His wife—his beautiful, Boston girl bride, Dorothy Fever—was waiting up for him. He was glad.

He swung the door closed behind him. There was a moment of silence, then a quickly muffled cry and a dull thud.



Exclusive True Feature

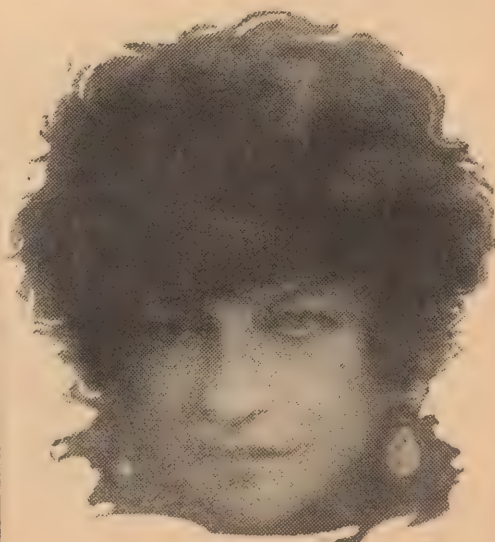
THAT LIED

By
FRANCISCO JOSÉ



*England
has had some
strange crime
mysteries—but
none more so than
the phantom strang-
ler, who baffled Scot-
land Yard!*

Sara Marti,
the half-caste
dancing girl
for whose
favor two
men were
strangled.



Then, examining the injured man's neck, he noticed certain things that made him determine to consult the police while calming the hysterical cries of the young wife.

Gently but firmly he led Mrs. Paugh to her room and told her to remain there.

"Everything will be all right," he said, but he cautioned her not to interfere. He promised to give the best of attention to her husband.

The police arrived. Other neighbors, also aroused by the wild screams, had seen to that. By this time Paugh had partially recovered, but he could give no information as to his attacker. It had all happened so suddenly, just as he reached for the light switch.

To the police, the physician pointed out that which he didn't want the wife to see. The lurking, would-be assassin had buried his thumbs in his victim's eyes and almost gouged them out as he endeavored to throttle him. There were blue marks on the skin under the ears showing where fingers had pressed in with almost deadly result.

The police looked. They understood the significance of the peculiarly marked eyes and the purple spots on the throat. This was no chance thug or suddenly overtaken robber. There was a dreadful, premeditated deadliness about it.

"The Apache method!" They spoke softly so that the young wife would not hear. "He's lucky to be alive!"

They made a search of the neighborhood. They questioned the householders as to chance strangers. They looked for tell-tale signs. Nothing had been disturbed. No one had specially noted strangers.

When Mr. Paugh and his wife were somewhat recovered they questioned them in detail. "Did they have any enemies? Had they recently been to Paris? Could any one wish to do away with them?"

But the whole investigation was fruitless. As far as either Rathburn or his wife knew, they had no enemies, certainly none of such a dangerous breed as the strangling Apaches.

SCOTLAND YARD took up the matter, for the Paughs were related to influential families.

Inspector Day was assigned to the case. He learned that Paugh had lately returned from a civil post in Bombay and was in London while waiting another appointment. He had just married the Boston girl whom he had previously met when she was visiting friends in the East.

Failing to find any motive for the mysterious attack he asked the authorities in India to investigate the associates of the official. Next he went to Paris, there to gain the cooperation of the Paris police.

It was while he was combing the left bank of the Seine, the haunt of the Apaches, that a second attempt was made upon the life of Rathburn Paugh.

"You won't be out late, will you, dear?" asked his wife, Dorothy, before he left. She made no mention of the previous attack, but her eyes were large and sad.

"Don't worry about me," answered Rathburn with a hearty laugh. "Lightning never strikes twice in the same spot," and he gaily kissed her before reaching for his cane and hat.

"I'll wait up for you," Dorothy pleaded.

"You mustn't do that, you know," interrupted Rathburn. "Anyway, I'll be back early, I promise," and he stepped into the waiting taxi and waved his hand from his lips.

It was a foggy night. The club where he went was warm and comfortable. There was cheer within, good drinks and the companionship of good fellows. The time slipped by rapidly.

Suddenly, with a start, Rathburn jumped up and called for his hat and stick and topcoat. It was past midnight and he had promised to be back early. How his wife would worry!

With a guilty conscience he bade the driver hurry. Alighting before his home his eyes went first to the upper window, still aglow. He saw his wife's form as she looked through the curtains at the sound of the cab's brakes. Quickly he paid his fare and ran up the steps to let himself in. He stepped inside.

"Here I am, Dorothy," he called, as he swung the door closed behind him.

"Oh, I'm glad you're back, I've been so worried," his wife answered. "Come up and tell me the news."

But Rathburn never went up the stairs.

Hearing a sudden scuffle his wife went to her door. The hall below was dark, while she distinctly remembered leaving the light burning. A cold chill almost paralyzed her. There was a deathly quiet below.

Summoning all her strength she called: "Oh Rathburn, Rathburn! Answer me! Are you all right?"

Listening, every nerve in her body drawn to the breaking point, she heard the quiet closing of a door in the back of the house.

Running, stumbling down the stairs she somehow reached the lower hall only to fall over something soft and yielding on the floor at the very foot of the long flight. With an awful scream, she fainted.

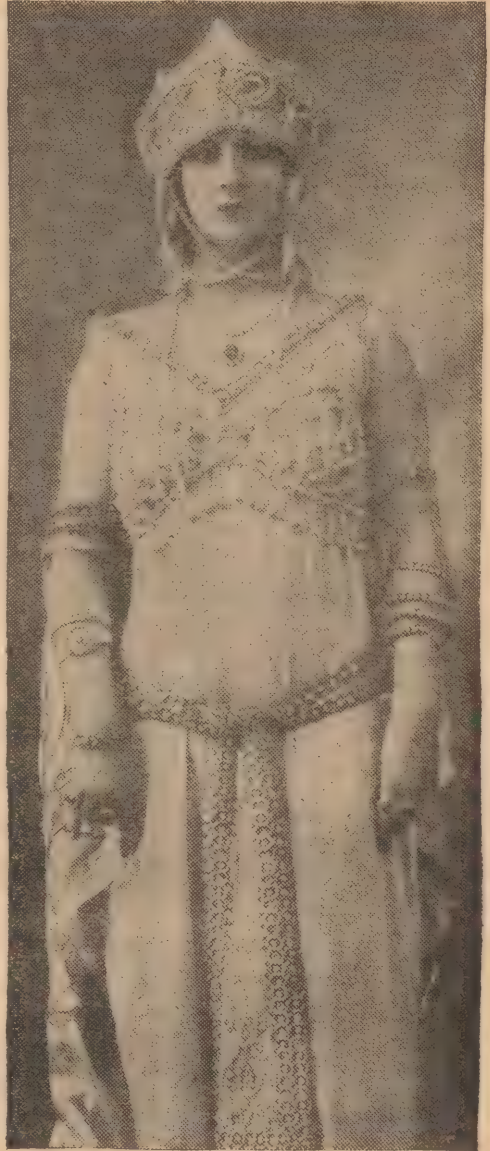
As partially clad neighbors reached the house and clamored for admittance, her husband moaned and twisted beside her, aroused to a last futile struggle for life. But presently he lay still. He was dead.

The neighbors forced the door and found the two bodies. The police summoned the ambulance and scoured the neighborhood. They carefully sealed the house and placed two detectives on guard at the front and rear.

Scotland Yard telephoned to Paris and recalled Inspector Day, who made a careful inspection. He called at the sanitarium and talked with the heart-broken wife. He examined the body of the dead man and found again the evidence of terrific pressure of fingers on the throat—the awful mark of the Apache slayer.

Nothing had been disturbed in the house but a rear door, which upon examination showed signs of being expertly jimmied—the spring lock having been reached by a thin, long, knife blade, and worked back. There were tiny nicks on its brass surface, but so expertly had the job been done that the varnish

JANABAI ROHADE, GARBED IN THE WEALTH OF JEWELS THAT BEFIT HER CASTE AND RANK



on the moulding was hardly marked.

Evidently the strangler had watched for the absence of Rathburn Paugh, then entered and laid in wait for him, attacking in the brief interval between his entering and his switching on of the light.

As the widow remembered having left the lower light burning, he had turned it off the better to achieve his purpose and hide his identity. In the commotion he made his get-away out the rear door, and probably through a neighboring

courtyard. All this Inspector Day determined to his own satisfaction.

Before the influential friends of the former government official could give an honored burial to Rathburn Paugh, the Scotland Yard ace again examined the throat of the victim. With a microscope he observed the tell-tale signs of fingerprints. By the aid of the most skilled of the department, these vague, shadowy outlines were photographed.

The first reproductions showed faint white and black lines, but when greatly magnified, then strengthened, and then reduced, they were distinct enough for identification.

The prints were copied, placed on circulars, and made a part of the bulletin that is regularly sent to the police of Paris, New York, Berlin and other world cities.

"Ah," said Inspector Day, "the slayer's identification will be perfect—if we can but find him."

BACK again to Paris he went. There he called upon M. Morain, the Prefect of Police, showing him the fingerprints. The Prefect was anxious to co-operate.

"That was one of the features of the death of the German, *Herr Spado*," said M. Morain after a study of the police files.

"It was an Apache, *Monsieur le Inspector*, who killed *Herr Spado*. It happened in the Rue Michaud. I agree with you that it could only have been an Apache who killed your M. Paugh. Of that we may be certain.

"A man who is called 'the Sparrow' was guilty of killing the German, but when we attempted to catch him he escaped from France, possibly going to England. He is noted for his swiftness of flight.

"We concluded that the German had been killed for his money," continued the official. "He was known to have carried a large sum at the time, having come from Leipzig to Paris where he sold a great amount of goods. With him was a young French woman, a girl, and they engaged an apartment in Rue Michaud."

This girl, Inspector Day learned from the records, had been seen around the scene of the murder on the day previous to the finding of the body. Then she disappeared and no further trace was found of either the girl or the Sparrow. Due to the similarity of the two murders every past detail became important to the puzzled Inspector.

A murder without a motive is hardly possible and the motive of the strangling of Rathburn Paugh had not as yet come to light. It was not robbery in this instance and possibly that of the German was not essentially robbery, reasoned the detective.

A year slipped by. Periodically, every three months, the circular bearing the fingerprints was sent to the police bureaus in American and European cities asking that they be checked against the prints of all known criminals. No word and no information was received. No arrests were possible.

Scanning the list of friends of the bereaved wife, received from Bombay, Inspector Day found the name of the daughter of the governor of the province, who was then traveling on the continent. She was the only individual who had not been interviewed by either the police of London or India. Her position and the fact that she was traveling, Inspector Day had concluded, offered little possibility of helpful information. Reconsidering, he determined to reach her.

"I want your permission to do an unusual thing," said the Inspector to his chief that day.

"I don't know what new thing you can be wanting to do," came the answer, "but if you have a plan, or as the Americans say, a 'hunch' to follow, then you have my permission to go the limit on the slaying of Rathburn Paugh. His friends are crying to me for action!"

"Very good," answered the ace of the Yard. "I'll not stop to explain unless you wish."

"Oh, don't explain, until afterwards," he laughed, and waved his hand over the mass of reports on his desk indicating the pressure of his work and his complete confidence in his detective.

Inspector Day went to the files and

carefully extracted certain duplicate newspaper clippings of the slaying, particularly those that had to do with its mysteriousness and the suggestion of hidden motives.

Then he made a phone call—an odd phone call for a Scotland Yard official to make. A newspaper office was connected and adroitly told that there might be important developments soon having to do with the Paugh mystery strangling. He mentioned, incidentally, that the daughter of a Bombay official of the Indian government was even then in Paris, and she was a former friend of Rathburn Paugh.

Carefully clipping the stories that appeared as a result, he placed them in an envelope in his pocket and bought a ticket to Paris.

A VISITOR called at the office of M. Morain, Prefect of the Paris Police. She was an attractive Hindu with large dark eyes, mysterious, inscrutable. With a slight bow she seated herself at the desk of the Prefect.

He smiled his welcome. There was no doubt of her beauty.

"I am Janabai Rohade of Bombay," she began impressively. "My father is governor of a province in India. I have come to tell you who was the murderer of *Herr Spado*, the German merchant, and of Rathburn Paugh, the English official."

The seasoned police official drew a pad before him and wrote on it. "*Inform Inspector Day to come immediately, if possible,*" it read. He pressed a button. A secretary took the note.

To his visitor he said, smiling: "Please tell me what you know, I am very much interested indeed."

"Rathburn Paugh," she began, "and *Herr Spado* both loved a girl they met in Bombay, where the German was, like the Englishman, a temporary resident. This girl, by name Sari Marti, attracted both of these men. In some ways she was very bad and in other ways good. She had been brought to Bombay by the German. The Englishman was sorry for her and tried to help her to be of a

different sort. My father received a report that she was of the Apaches of Paris and he had her watched.

"The German was rich, but the Englishman was not. Sari Marti listened to the pleadings of Sahib Paugh, for she loved him—but she continued to live with the German for he furnished her with jewels and clothing. All the time she wavered between the two. Then she met a young outcast, Abdur Rahim, who was a thief of the city. She tired of him and his crude ways and persuaded him to go to Paris, confiding to him the secret words that would gain him entrée to the Apaches, of whom she was a part.

"When Sari and *Herr Spado* returned to Europe, going first to Leipsig and then coming to this city, Abdur Rahim, who had become known as the Sparrow, sought out the German and killed him. He, too, loved Sari.

"The Englishman, believing that it was useless to try to help the dancing girl, married Dorothy Fever and forgot the little affair in Bombay. But Sari, I am now certain, did not forget Rathburn, neither did Abdur, principally because she talked of him. This must have angered the Sparrow. It was thus that he hunted out the English official and strangled him in London."

The high-born daughter of an Indian governor paused in her recital, which if true, thought the Prefect, was stranger than any fiction.

"Pardon me, *mademoiselle*," said M. Morain, "but will you tell me how it is that you, a girl of the Hindus, the daughter of a governor, should know the secret of two murders?"

"Ah, yes, *monsieur* Prefect, I will tell. To-day I received at my hotel, a letter telling of the efforts of the English and Paris police to discover the murderer of Sahib Paugh. I have been traveling and, although I had heard, I did not want to think about it. Is this strange to you? But you see, the one whom you call the Sparrow is my brother, *monsieur*!" The Hindu girl's eyes were large and sad, yet she looked straight at the Prefect.

"*Chacun a son gout!*" He said.

aloud—"That is a very different matter."

His caller continued: "I, too, knew the wife of the Englishman, Sahib Paugh. She was my friend, and I grieve in my heart for her. I have seen the girl Sari Marti, also, and if it were not for my brother she would be, perhaps, as good as the Englishman would have had her. My friend, the Englishman's wife, does not know of Sari. I do not want her to know. But whatever must be, will be. It is now my desire that my brother be punished for the death of my friend's husband and for bringing dishonor on our family."

"Do you know where we may find Sari Marti?" the Prefect asked.

"She may be found, I am told, at a place called The Tomb. This is a cave which the police will know on the left bank of the Seine. She will be found with the Sparrow, for since the Englishman and the German have gone he is the only one she can count as a lover."

AFTER the strange visit was ended and the ever polite Prefect had bowed the Hindu girl from his office, M. Morain welcomed and congratulated Inspector Day upon his cleverness. Together they went over the information.

As a result Sari Marti was found, a carefree girl who danced and sang and lived any way she might, and was happy so long as she was popular among her kind. From her was obtained the secret hiding place of the Sparrow. It was a cave, an underground room, and the Sparrow dared not leave it except at night and then only well-disguised.

Once the Sparrow was in the hands of the police his fingerprints were checked with those taken from the throat of the Englishman. Then Inspector Day discovered that the newly made impression and those secured from the dead man's throat did not match. They were entirely different!

Finally the exasperated officials determined to call Janabai Rohade again. After all, they argued, it was her accusation that was now being acted upon. Let her explain, if she could. But fingerprints can't lie!

It was a dramatic meeting that was staged between brother and sister. Calmly she looked at him. There were no tears and no hysterics.

She spoke gently. She told him that he had violated the laws of their caste, that he had become a disgrace to their honored family and must be punished lest his relatives suffer in their hereafter.

The Sparrow only laughed.

"My sister, she is mad!" he said loudly. "You can see for yourself that the fingerprints do not agree."

Then Inspector Day determined to send a long cable to the police of India.

It was Asa Ram, chief of the Bombay police, that supplied the explanation. He cabled, at length:

"Abdur Rahim, the Hindu, has inherited much from his ancestors. It is likely that he has never killed with his own hands, but with the hands of another. Discover if the Sparrow did not take with him on his murder trips the hands from some other victim and close them around the throat of the Englishman."

The sister agreed that this might well be the method of her brother. But the Sparrow only laughed tauntingly.

Then Sari was questioned. She recalled that each time her Apache lover had strangled he had killed another man before. She did not know why, until it was explained to her. These deaths were not investigated closely since they were of the vagrants and city's riff-raff. Looking up the records it was found that some of the victims of that date had been buried with their hands severed and these hands had never been reported found.

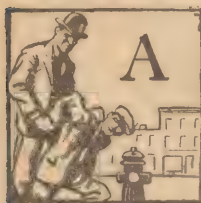
Thus, finally, was the mystery cleared. It was a dead man's hands whose fingerprints were discovered on Rathburn Paugh's throat. With diabolical skill these hands had been limbered and softened. They had been gruesomely tied to the Sparrow's hands. Swiftly, silently they were pressed deep into the throat by the living hands of the young Hindu Apache.

In London, the Sparrow—Abdur Rahim, son of a governor—paid with his life for his fearful deed, even though in this instance it might be said that the infallible fingerprints had lied.



ANSWERED by GATS

It was gambler against gambler, wolf against wolf, when Solo Drake bucked the deadly crime-ring which had laughed at the law . . . Told by the leading character.



ACROSS the desk at Headquarters, Dan Otero nestled thick shoulders deeper into the chair back. El Paso's Police Chief was squat, peppery and al-

together competent.

"Mr. Drake," he says, "I'd like to help you, but as things are there's nothing we can do. You say there's a graft ring takin' over most of the big gambling games along the Border. Hell, don't you 'spose I know that? But so far they've fought shy of the law. Old T. N. T. Warner is well-known in El Paso. He faded out of the picture a few years ago but I'm not surprised to hear

he's back and up to his old tricks. Who're the other two birds you say're mixed up in this Ring?"

"Ice and Monte Roma," I says.

He grunted, frowning. "Never heard of 'em."

He plucked a black cigar from the box at his elbow, clipped the end with strong white teeth, scratched a match and lit up.

I went on. "I realize, Chief, that this may look like a grudge fight on my part, wanting to smash this gang, me bein' a gambler myself. I've been waiting for you to say that. But the name of 'Solo' Drake has come to stand for something along the Border the past few years. I shoot straight, deal square and

try to give the boys a run for their money."

Chief Otero didn't say anything and I got up.

"I didn't come here to ask El Paso's Police force to protect my business. When I can't run my own games I'll take the count without yellin'. I did ask you to help me pin the killing of my brother on this same big Ring."

He started to speak. I held up my hand.

"Wait. I know what you're goin' to say. That my kid brother was hurt in a boxing match with K. O. Clancey over at the Stadium and died from the effects later."

I reached over, slamming a fist down on the desk top till the inkwell rattled. "Those birds went into that fight pre-meditating murder. They killed my brother in the ring instead of up a dark alley somewhere. That's the only difference."

Otero's eye-brows lifted. "The doctors say it was blood-poisoning from an infected thumb."

I boiled at that. "The Kid's thumb was hurt before he ever went into that fight. He hurt it training. I tell you it was a lousy frame. But I can see where it puts you."

I clapped on my hat and turned toward the door. I could have forced Otero's hand, but I wasn't ready to do that yet. I says, "All right, Chief, I'll play this game solo, like I always do. Thanks for your time."

He shrugged, and spread his hands. "Watch your step, Drake, and soft pedal that gat. I'd hate to see *both* you boys get it in the neck."

His glance met mine and held. The Chief was a good scout. Had always been a fight fan, and my brother, Kid Drake, had been headed for the championship until the dirty fouling a week since.

No one had seen that groin punch there in the crowded Stadium. The Kid had smothered K. O. Clancey for three rounds, then in the beginning of the fourth, comin' out of a clinch, he sank to the canvas and didn't get up. K. O. slid out of that clinch with a weak jab

to the jaw, just a love tap, but it had been on the strength of it that K. O. got the decision.

Back in the dressing room, the Kid had gasped out the dope to me, but he was too game to claim the foul publicly.

He had died a week later.

I leaned across the desk, now, tippin' my hat low over my eyes.

"Forgetting your rank for a minute, Chief," I told him, "I'm speakin' as man to man. You and I both know the sport game in El Paso stinks to high heaven and has ever since it changed management. Who is this young 'Strangler' Neff, the new promoter? Nobody ever heard of him before he turns up here a while back as the big fight boss. I happen to know he was a cheap barnstormin' wrestler until old Hardaway Neff, his uncle, struck oil in the Hobbs fields.

"Then Neff got behind the lad, slapped down a lot of kale when the Stadium was on its last legs, railroaded the Strangler into the promoter's job and since then things have gone from bad to worse. Strangler Neff's a weak sister. Old Hardaway could give him money, but the boy lacked the brains. It was written that somebody'd play the Strangler for a sucker sooner or later. They have with a vengeance, and my kid brother's killing was only one of the irons this Ring's got in the fire."

I paused for breath.

Otero watched me, eyes narrowed, smoke trickling from his nostrils. He didn't say anything.

I went on. "Right now I need to find the Strangler. Can you tip me off where he is?"

Otero raised his hands, rolled the cigar across his lips, and shrugged.

"You're a trouble breeder, Solo. I'll admit I never heard of you dealin' a dirty hand or croakin' a guy unnecessarily, but this——"

"If my word means anything, Chief, and it ought to, I'm not gunning for Strangler Neff. He knows too much about that dirty fight. Neff's been plunging heavy lately, gambling. All I'm askin' is where he's playing."

I had to find Neff first to connect with

the gang behind him, but I guess Otero figured I was out to clean the Strangler of his roll. Funny way to feed a grudge. Anyway it helped my case.

He breathed a sigh of relief and winked.

"Look up Gatlin, Sid Gatlin. He ought to be able to get you boys together." His chair scraped as he rose. "Remember that bad habit of yours——"

"—beating the guy that's gunning for me to the draw? Yeah, Chief. That's why I'm not pushing up cactus now instead of talkin' with you. There's just one thing. If I get these dirty killers red handed, I may yell for help."

"We'll come wide open," the Chief grins. We shook hands on that and I went out.

It was dark when I reached the street, but I had plenty of time to dress and eat a good dinner before going out to Sid Gatlin's gambling joint on the Cruces Road. It was a swell dump and called for a tux.

From my rooms at the Del Norte I went 'round to Toni's Place but the food wasn't a kick. Fact is, nothing seemed right any more. The Kid's passing left me flat. We'd been pretty close. He was the one big thing in life I'd cared for. I'd stuck him through college, made a real guy of him. He'd tried to get me to quit the cards, too.

"It's a tough racket, Solo," he'd said, the very night before the fight. "When I'm champ, you're quittin' it, see? We'll go into business together somewhere."

Well, that was all by the way now. The lights got kinda dim around me and I cursed under my breath, reaching for a cigarette. I hadn't told the Kid anything about the Ring. Why bother him about my affairs when he was busy puttin' away would-be champs? Six months before, the Roma Brothers, Ice and Monte, had approached me in Tia Juana, but I wouldn't run with 'em or stand for their dirty racket. Since then they'd been out to get me.

I wasn't kidding myself that the fatal match where my brother lost his life was a frame for just the fixed bets. It was a stab in the dark at me through my brother. Up to now, I'd crabbed their

game whenever I could. Solo Drake's tip meant something at turf and ring-side.

But until they got the Kid it had been all in the day's work. I'd scrapped crooked gamblers before. The Border was lousy with 'em. Now it was different. Three men were marked for the skids, and I intended seeing they rode 'em. It was a desperate game but with the Kid gone I welcomed the odds.

Ice and Monte Roma with the local shot, T. N. T. Warner, had marked down Strangler Neff at the Stadium where a bunch of big matches were booked. It was high time I hooked up with the young promoter!

I got up and reached for my check.

MY WATCH read 11 P. M. when I walked into Sid Gatlin's place on the Cruces Road. Outsiders thought the big gambling all went on across the line in Juarez. That's why exclusive places like Sid Gatlin's did so well North of the Rio. Mostly big money played there on the q. t.

Sid's was a small summer hotel worked over for gambling purposes. Everything was class—tiled floors, plush carpets, heavy draperies and soft-voiced attendants. I knew Sid Gatlin. Content to run straight, he'd have been the finest card player in the United States. But he'd fallen for big money, shady money.

I met him coming down the wide stairs at the back of the foyer before I got to the room's middle. Some flunky'd buzzed him, probably the door man. He was a big guy in a three hundred dollar tux. He ran to stomach some now, but those pale slaty eyes under reddish lashes were as cold and hard as in the old days.

We stopped three feet apart, facing each other, and the still room got quieter. His face was a mask. Mine told nothing.

Then his thin lips clipped, "Lost your way, Drake?"

"Not at all. Just looking for a friend—young Neff—around her somewhere?"

"Something against him, Solo?" His voice stayed low and brittle as ice.

"No. That's a promise. That enough?"

"Yes." He turned to an attendant standing by one of the closed doors on the right. "Take Mr. Drake up to eighty-seven—he's looking for a little poker, I suppose?"

He turned, eyebrows questioning.

"Your trick, Sid."

The flunky breathed "Yes, sir—this way, sir," and Gatlin stepped back to watch me as I trailed him up the broad stairs. Wide and winding they were, laid with plush rugs.

Once up we were in a long, dimly lit hall. It stretched away, flanked by closed doors, so thick and soundless that the place was tomblike with quiet. Games went on behind those heavy panels. Games for high stakes. Well, I guessed I would sit in on one myself soon.

My guide stopped before eighty-seven. It was well up the hall. He rapped.

No voice answered but in a moment the door swung back, silently. I stepped inside. The door closed.

It was a large airy room done in soft browns. A door led off at the back. An easy "out" when crowded.

Three men sat at cards around a table under a low-dropped greenshaded lamp. One of them was T. N. T. Warner.

He glanced up, and under the light I saw his eyes go to slits. I tip the scales at one ninety, but he was bigger than that and thick-chested. Lantern jawed, heavy browed. A dead Mex cigarette stuck to his thick lower lip.

"Hello, Warner," I says, coming forward.

"Lo, Drake," he growls, riffling the cards.

I heard a gasp. The man in a checked suit and gray derby fumbling over his cards, swung 'round.

"K. O. Clancey," I says, and I guess my tone scared him some more.

He knocked his chair over getting up and spilled his hand.

"I'm out anyway, Warner," he stutters, shoving in his chips. "Maybe Drake came to play."

I looked at the man who had fouled my brother and felt nothing but disgust for the rat. Victim of the Ring, he was a rotten tool.

"Might play some. Any objections?" I says, glancing at Strangler Neff still seated across from Warner.

"Okey by me," he mumbled, wagging a fat cigar between sensual lips, saliva trickling down on a weak chin, "if Clancey's out and you wanta play, Drake. Let's get goin', I'm behind—maybe this guy'll break the jinx." He glanced at a watch on his hairy wrist.

Neff must have slipped a lot since he left the mat. He wore a gray tweed suit, slouch hat, and puffed on a fat cigar, promoter style. There were pouches under his eyes and his cheeks were mottled by wrong living. He had good shoulders, but his wind was gone.

I kicked Clancey's chair upright and sat down. My eyes ran over the table; most of the chips were in front of T. N. T. The whole thing smelled like a frame. T. N. T.'s presence in the game proved it. The Ring was hard at it, squeezing young Neff dry. Another thing. T. N. T. hadn't seemed quite surprised enough to see me at Sid's place. Poker Faced Gatlin had greased my entrance to the little game a bit too well. It began to look like Solo Drake was included in the frame.

I looked up just in time to surprise the look between Clancey and T. N. T. Then the Pug slipped out through that silent door.

"A little Stud?" says Warner and the game was on.

Warner started to deal a hand. I bought some chips from him. We placed bets and when the first new round of cards dropped on the baize, I knew what was up.

Warner was dealing crooked and wasn't even trying to hide it. Why? He knew he wasn't slick enough to deceive me and, what's more, he didn't seem to care.

There were two things I could do—some sharpening myself or call him. Either way it would end in shooting.

I lit a cigarette and glanced at Neff. He was betting on his third card. Under the low hung light his face sagged, showed strain. He munched on the fat cigar savagely, eyes glittering, furiously sweeping the board.

None of us had even a pair showing. He was high with an ace and a ten on the board.

It was mighty quiet. So much so I could hear the breath whistling up through the ex-wrestler's nostrils.

To my left Warner was a sphinx. Hands moving like an automaton, thick brows lowering.

To Neff, it looked like a battle of wits at cards. I knew better—guns were going to roar in that silent room, pronto. What's more, I didn't propose T. N. T. should choose his own time.

Neff shifted uneasily in his chair. His slow brain sensed something in the air. He didn't know what.

Warner dealt the fourth card. He had a king ten combination in sight. Until the next round Neff was high man with a couple of aces. I knew what Warner's next card would be. A king. In other words, there was another king in the hole.

My eyes were glued on those nimble fingers of Warner's. I caught the shift. It was fast but not speedy enough for a professional looking on.

My hand slid across the table covering the cards. "The next one comes from the bottom again, T. N. T. And I'm guessing it's another king."

Warner's eyes went ugly, and his heavy jaw shot out. He tensed forward.

"Say, just what the hell——"

Neff sat frozen, jaws sagging wide. The cigar loosened, plopped to the board.

"You're dealing from the bottom again and turning up another king, you cheap 'mechanic'!"

I knew what those words would bring.

Neff shoved back from the table, as Warner got to his feet growling deep in his throat.

"My God, boys, don't—" but Neff's yelp was drowned in gun fire.

Warner was a fast man with a gat and his dangling fingers had slid inside his pocket as he rose, but his bullet furrowed the green baize of the table top.

Fired from his pocket it was, but my own hand knew the route to my shoulder holster too well. An eye can't follow it.

I slung two slugs into Warner before Neff could swallow.

He sagged, choking down across the table, rolling sideways to the floor.

"Hell, Drake! It's murder," gasped Neff, but I was across the room snapping the Yale on the hall door.

He'd sunk into a chair when I got back to him. I shook his shoulder savagely.

"Get up and flit. Out that door," I nodded toward the rear. "My hotel's the Del Norte. Meet me there."

"But, Drake, you've——"

"Okey," I said, "stick here and get pinched for murder."

That rocked him to his feet. He stumbled across the thick rug and slipped out the door.

Already I was stooping over Warner's body. I had no qualms. Not only had this man tried to iron me but he'd been one of the three who got my brother.

Frisking his pockets, I dug up papers. I. O. U.'s, some for big money. A folded certified check for a thousand dollars made out to Neff and endorsed by him, and inside that fold, a piece of envelope with five scrawled words:

"Pocheck gets two falls. Neff."

I frowned down staring. Pocheck, Pocheck? Then I had it. "Head Lock" Harlin vs Pocheck, the Pole. The thousand bucks was the jack young Neff had got from the Ring to throw the championship wrestling match tomorrow night, to the contender. They'd sure fixed the Strangler so he couldn't double-cross them, after staking him to the money to fix the encounter. And already T. N. T. Warner had won back Neff's split. The Strangler was sure a sap!

There came a tap on the hall door. I jerked up, stuffing the incriminating evidence in my pocket. Once there, I unlocked the door and stepped outside. I heard the Yale click behind me. That would hold 'em for a minute.

I was facing two anxious-eyed flunkies. Sid Gatlin was hurrying up the hall. His big face was as frozen as ever but the fat on his stomach was making him puff.

"What's happened in there, Solo?" he asked, hard eyes flickering to where my hand hovered—near the satin of my right coat lapel. He knew what was under it.

"Plenty," I said, "but I'm advising you to keep your shirt on, Sid. I'll answer for my part of it. I'm at the Del Norte. Just now I'm going away from here—" He took a half step forward. "—and suggest no one tries stopping me."

Sid reached out, tried the knob, and cursed under his breath.

I turned and walked down the thick carpeted hall. The three still stood staring as I reached the stair head.



OUTSIDE I grabbed one of the waiting taxis and headed back down the paved road toward town. I wasn't so sure young Neff would be at the hotel when I got there—still, there weren't many courses open to him. He was the kind of man who once he recognizes leadership, follows like a sheep.

At the curb I paid the driver and hurried into the lobby of the Del Norte.

I crossed to the desk and got my key. As I turned toward the elevator a man slid up out of the shadows of decorative palms at the reception room's entrance.

It was Neff. His face was strained and white, hat awry, loose lips working. He plucked at my sleeve.

I hurried him into the elevator.

"Snap out of it," I says in his ear as we shot upward. "Everything's okey."

My words seemed to hearten him a little, but the elevator boy stared after us curiously as we stepped out on third and made for my room.

Once inside, Neff flopped on the bed. He jerked off his hat and ran shaking fingers through damp hair.

"How'd you get away from Sid's?" he asked hoarsely. "God, what a mess!"

"We'll forget Sid's for the present," I says, lighting a cigarette and walking up and down. I think better on my feet.

"What I want from you is just what this gang's got on you."

"Gang?" he sputtered, and his little eyes got cunning. "What gang do you mean, Drake?"

"Good Lord, man," I says, coming to a stop in front of him, "this isn't time for stalling. You know who I'm talking about. T. N. T. Warner's kicked out so there's just two left. Ice and Monte Roma—what they got on you?"

He ran his tongue over thick lips, staring. His face had gone a shade whiter.

"I don't know—they ain't got—"

I shot a hand out and grabbed his coat lapel, shook him savagely. It was treatment he understood.

"Come clean, Neff. I gotta get next to these boys. Where are they?"

"I tell you I don't know," he gasped through chattering teeth. "Cripes—"

"Okey," I says, stepping back. "There's been a guy bumped off to-night. Folks know you and I were there—we'll have to answer for him. If you ain't helping me clean this thing up—" I shrugged and pawed for a second smoke.

The bluff worked.

"Aw, hell, Drake, what's your game? You know about all I do. They've been playin' me for a sucker. Oh, I've been a damn fool. They got me where I couldn't quit—got my checks, I. O. U.'s—they—"

The 'phone bell shrilled.

His head came up. There was new terror in his eyes.

"That's the bulls, Solo—they've come after us."

I stepped over to the desk, picked up the instrument.

"Yes?" I says.

"Mr. Neff's wanted in the lobby," droned the voice of the desk girl.

"Thanks," I says, and hung up.

"They want you downstairs, Neff."

I could hear his teeth chattering over there on the bed. He sat twisting at his hands, staring.

"But, Drake, you're not goin' to let 'em take me away? You're goin' to tell 'em you croaked Warner, ain't you?" He stooped over and buried his face in his shaking hands.

I crossed back. "Listen, Neff. I'm playin' straight if you'll do the same, savvy?" Sinking my fingers in the scruff of his neck, I jerked him upright. "Just one thing. Didn't the Ring frame the Drake-Clancey fight?"

He shrank back, mumbling.

"What'd your uncle say if he knew Clancey had brass knucks stowed under those gloves of his?" I shook him like a rat. "Wasn't it a frame to get the Kid and get him for good—wasn't it?"

"Yes—oh yes, Drake," he gasped, "lay off me."

I hurled him back against the bed, stood away from him.

"Now get this, Neff. I shot Warner—I'm not denying it—but you'd better play square, see? It ain't the bulls downstairs or they'd have come up—probably some of the old crowd, but remember what I said."

Mechanically he straightened his tie, wiped his lips. Then he reached for his hat, rose and walked toward the door.

He paused. Then turned and stumbled back. His jaw sagged in fright. Eyes stared. Words came in a jumble from his loose lips.

"Cripes, Drake, it's the gang! They're after me. They think I've crossed 'em. They're puttin' me on the spot!"

I grabbed his sagging shoulders.

"Come out of it," I says. "You're worth a whole lot more to 'em alive than dead. If anybody gets grabbed for Warner's killin' to-night it'll be me. Can't you see you're their star witness?"

That got through to him. He turned again like a man in a daze, went to the door and out into the hall.

I HAD to work fast. Jerking open the dresser drawer, I grabbed a handful of cartridges and stuffed 'em in my pockets. My hat and top coat were in the chair where I'd thrown them. Picking them up, I ran to the open window that looked out on a fire escape.

Outside, I plunged down, taking those steel stairs two at a time. I dropped off the weighted ladder before it struck the cobbles of the alley court.

My time was short. It was a matter of moments for the elevator to shoot up to

third and pick up young Neff. Once on the main floor level Neff, with whoever came after him, would get outside and flit.

Springing down the alley and up alongside the short street to the front, I paused and poked a head 'round the corner.

The Strangler was just climbing into a yellow cab. I made out a second figure inside, at least the glowing end of a cigar. Then the cab jerked away from the curb.

A second slid to position, and the driver hadn't killed his motor before I was inside.

"Tail that cab that just left, Bo," I said. "Ten bucks to keep him in sight, careful."

We rolled away.

I spent a little time reloading my automatic. I'd be using it soon again.

The town was pretty quiet by this time and there was scarcely any traffic. It wasn't so hard trailing that first car, although they traveled fast.

Ten minutes saw us leaving town behind, headed toward the country club and the newer residential section.

There wasn't much doubt in my mind where the chase was leading. Leaving Sid's, Strangler Neff had probably left a trail a yard wide. The Roma brothers had got wise he was holed up with me at the Del Norte and had called him in. If my hunch was right, I'd be meeting those boys face to face in short order. Well, I was ready. I'd answered for the first member of the mob who had killed my brother. With an ace in the hole I'd gamble I could handle the other two. Neff was that ace.

We were on higher ground now and the night was hot. A soft breeze off the Rio Grande drifted through the lowered window up out of Mexico. Somehow, it brought thoughts of the Kid. He'd have liked this. The Kid had a dash of romance about him—Irish ancestry, I guess. The game would have stirred him, too. Night softened the drabness of Jaurez that lay a twinkling mass of lights to the west.

The taxi brought up with a jerk. The driver got out, opened my door.

"Those birds parked about a block down before that three story brick. I thought maybe I'd better douse the lights and stay here."

"Good," I says, climbing down. "Here's an extra five spot for using the old bean. Mind backing 'round and cooing up the Avenue?"

"Okey," he grinned, slipping back under the wheel.

I watched him roll away, then made for an all night drug store I spotted a block back.

Once inside the 'phone booth, I rang Headquarters.

The Chief's voice answered.

"Hello, Otero. Solo Drake speaking. Thought you might have gone home."

He mumbled something about a cop's job never ending.

I laughed and says: "'Member our talk about the wagon? Well, send her rollin'. This may be a bum steer but it's a nice night and the boys'll enjoy the ride."

I slipped him the neighborhood and address, told him I hoped there'd be a nice collar waiting, and hung up on another warning of his about using my gat.

Back down at the brick house I opened a low gate in an iron fence, inclosing a landscaped lawn, and slipped up the walk. I wasn't on a prow. Rather, I didn't make any bones about running up the stairs and ringing the bell.

The house was dark with the exception of light showing under the blinds from a room to the right.

I had to ring again before bolts rasped and the door opened. I saw a familiar face poking out through the crack—K.O. Clancey! He was sure stingy with that door.

"Yes?" he growls suspiciously. Then Clancey gasped when he made me out. He tried shutting the door. No use. My foot was in it.

"Lo, K. O. I'm comin' in."

I did. He pushed some on the door but I was in earnest. He looked scared as I shoved in past him.

A long narrow hall showed doors leading off and a winding stairway at the back. There were some velvet drapes

scattered around. It was a pretty swell dump.

"What you want?" he managed, and just then I heard voices from the room on the right. One of 'em was Neff's. He seemed excited and wasn't bothering to talk low.

I stepped over.

"You can't go in there—" K. O. began, grabbing at my sleeve.

"Be yourself," I gritted, slamming him back against the wall.

I grabbed the knob, turned it. The door wasn't locked. I stepped in, swung back the drapes masking the door on the inside and blinked 'round.



HE place was a sort of library. Shelves of books covered the walls. A long table ran down the center. Three men, if you counted young Neff, sat at one end talking.

Ice Roma was facing me. He was a swarthy little Dago, dressed swell and glittering with rocks—one in his tie, one at each cuff and a three carat chunk of ice on the little finger of his left hand. His twisted mouth under a short black mustache carried a perpetual snarl.

His brother Monte sat tipped back in his chair, feet on the table—long, lean and dangerous. Thin-faced he was, with a nose flaring at the nostrils. Narrow-eyed, keen as a whip lash.

As usual, Neff's loose lips sagged open. The room got real still.

I stepped sideways from that door. Clancey was outside. My top coat was thrown back—hands hovering the satin lapels of my tux.

Ice's eyes flickered on them a moment. The snarl deepened.

"Yes?" he said, real soft, but I was watching Monte. He was slowly lowering his well shod feet to the carpet. His hand traveled leisurely toward a pocket.

"Just a cigarette, Monte, eh?" I lipped. "That's enough fire for you now."

He laughed low and pulled out the pack. Helped himself and reached a match on a tray at his elbow.

I watched those fluttering, dangerous hands.

Ice made the talk.

"We don't need you here, Solo. The cops will be tailing you and we don't like cops."

I said, "Yeah? I'm surprised."

"They'll know you murdered Warner now, Solo."

"So? Well, it won't be long, Ice, before they decide it was all a nice little frame-up and I killed one of your mob in self-defense. Neff, here'll have to tell them that. That's one reason I'm here."

Monte laughed and started to say something. Ice silenced him with a glance.

Neff, crouched back in his chair, started twisting at his hands, eyes on my face.

Ice went on. "Still bluffing, Solo. But it won't get by this time. You're through. Neff's evidence will"—he shrugged—"fix that."

"You thinkin' he'll swear I croaked Warner? That he didn't pull a gat on me first?"

"Fair at guessing riddles, Solo."

"Yeah," broke in Monte, rising slowly, "but this will be your last." Smoke drifted from his nostrils. His hands fluttered above his coat pockets. "Well, we're busy, Solo. Maybe you'll trot along now?"

I spoke to Neff with an eye for Monte's hands.

"What's the answer, Neff? You going to stick by the truth or tell a rotten lie for the Romas here?"

Neff gulped, swallowed noisily. His hands trembled on the arms of his chair. His tongue clicked when he talked.

"Cripes, Drake, what can I do? This here's a showdown. They'll get one of us. You know enough."

"Yes," said Monte, "too *damn* much."

I ignored him, and asked: "So you're still thinkin' these two birds here are the only ones that have anything on you?"

"Meanin' what, Drake?" Ice snarled the words. He leaned forward tapping at the table with the fingers of the one hand in sight.

I said: "Listen, you birds. When you started your crooked games down the Border here six months ago, you asked me to come with you. You were smart enough to know Solo Drake's name spelled something. You wanted my business. I didn't know you then but I looked you up. There was a trail of rotten frames back of you from Montreal to Mexico. I wasn't playing that kind of game and told you to go to hell.

"Since then you've tried sloughing me at every turn. For a while it was business, dirty business, but we'll let it go at that. Then you began framin' fights here at the Stadium. Well, that was your game, not mine, until you framed a dirty foul on my kid brother. He died from K.O.'s blow and you hoped that he would. You killed him, same as if you threw a dum dum into him. That's where you stepped off."

Ice sat very still. Neff was breathing hard through his nose. Monte stood crouching forward, eyes fixed, nostrils flaring.

"That's bad talk, Drake," Monte's voice was low and brittle. "Proofs are something else."

"Yeah? Well, I got plenty to convince a judge. Neff's certified checks, I.O.U.'s, and a signed promise to throw the Harlin-Pocheck match tomorrow night. Wonder what his honor'd say about brass knucks in Clancey's mitts the night he slugged my brother? You'll both hit the skids for that when Neff tells his story."

"You're a liar, Drake!" Monte's right hand fluttered lower above his sagging pocket.

"Hard words, Monte," I said softly. "Just a minute. 'Spose I didn't frisk Warner back at Sid's? Why you let him pack such valuable stuff's a mystery. All right, Neff"—I talked from the corner of my mouth, eyes still on Monte—"what's the answer?"

But everybody'd guessed that already. I had the dope. I'd called their bluff.

Neff got unsteadily to his feet. He made a lota noise in that deadly silent room.

"Good God, Drake! If it gets out—if my uncle gets wise—I'll——"

But I wasn't listening. There was Monte's hands. Those spread, dragging fingers flashed into his pocket, too late.

My own thirty-eight was out spitting swift death across that long table. Once! Twice!

Monte straightened, eyes flaring wide. His own gat exploded in his pocket as he whirled. It burned a hole there, the bullet burying in the floor. His left hand wavered to his chest and clutched at the widening spread of blood. Red showed on his lips as he cursed, choking. Slowly he sank, buckling at the knees, crashed to the floor.

"I was waiting for that. Watch yourself, Ice!" My gat swerved to cover the other Roma.

The door hadn't made any noise but the drapes bellied in the draft. They jerked apart and a gat poked through.

I whipped my gun over from the crouching form of Ice and fired. There was a yell and K.O. Clancey stumbled into the room, swearing—clutching a shattered wrist.

In that fraction of second, Ice Roma acted.

Dropping below the table his gat flashed out. We fired together. His bullet ploughed my shoulder, swung me half 'round. Mine caught him between the eyes. He'd had to see to shoot, and I can pierce a dime at fifty yards. An inch of skull at that distance was enough.

There came heavy pounding at the front door.

"Let 'em in," I clipped at the cowering figure of Neff, mumbling in his chair.

I leaned against the wall holding my numbed shoulder.

I heard Otero's voice in the hall, a

growled reply. He burst into the room followed by two of his men and young Neff.

He jerked up staring. His lips twitched in a slight hard smile. "Old tricks, eh, Drake? What's it all mean? I made it as fast as I could. Expected something like this. Warner's bumped over at Gatlin's. Now this." He waved a thick arm at the still figures of the Romas. "It'll take some explaining."

"Okey, Chief—it's a yarn of bribery, corruption and murder and it ends here. Warner pulled a gat on me. I shot in self-defense. Neff's deposition here will prove the same thing happened with the Romas."

The Chief turned to Neff. "Yes?" he says.

Neff nodded miserably.

Otero grunted. "They were a dirty lot, Solo, I could shake your hand on that. Still, I'm afraid——"

I jerked my one good hand from my pocket.

"I'll shake with you, Chief," I grinned, reaching toward him.

He hesitated a moment, then clasped my hand. I pressed hard. His eyes widened puzzled.

Pulling his hand away he stared at his palm. Something bright glittered there. A badge!

"What the——" he gasped.

"Yep," I answered. "The Ring was causing some international complications. Washington wanted somebody who knew their game to play it with 'em. I was it."

"Well, I'm dar-goned!" he muttered, as the frown left his face. "These birds pulled one frame too many."

"Yes," I answered, looking away. I was thinking of the Kid.

BERLIN!—The new giant airship saved from the fate of the R-100 by a nervy Yank—and a female cannibal!

Read

TEETH OF REVENGE

in May SCOTLAND YARD

GRIM HOUSE



England ★ ★ —

Grim and mysterious, stood the house, built upside-down—mysterious the atmosphere of tense expectancy that seethed within it. . . Told by a London barrister.



THE front door of Richard Vallon's house was in the roof.

Situated in a precipitous district in the north of England, the house was built against a high wall of rock and was reached by steps leading from the road which wound fifty feet above its chimney tops.

At about four o'clock on a hot August afternoon a very thin man and a very fat one got out of a motor car and slowly approached a curious little canopy by the roadside. When they reached it,

a narrow flight of stairs cut into the rock became visible behind a low gate.

The stout man, who was *Monsieur Victorien Dupont*, late of the French Secret Police, eyed the width of the descent questioningly.

"I told you," the thin man said, "I was bringing you to a strange place."

Monsieur Dupont looked down dubiously.

"I do not object," he returned, with the slightest possible trace of an accent, "to strange places, provided they are wide enough. But the possibility of becoming permanently wedged in the

only entrance to your friend's house——"

"In that case," the other said, "I had better go down first, so that one of us may be sure of arriving. But first of all we had better obey the instructions."

He pressed an electric bell set in a brass plate on which the request "*Please ring before descending*" was engraved.

A moment later the dark depths of the stone steps were brilliantly lighted. They went slowly down.

At the bottom a heavy oak door was already open, and an elderly butler was waiting to receive them. They entered a large hall. The butler closed the door.

"Mr. Vallon is in his study, sir. I will tell him you are here, and send up for your luggage."

The two men looked about them curiously. Through the open windows they gazed down the whole height of the house to gardens that sloped away on the hillside.

"It certainly is a strange house," the thin man said.

Monsieur Dupont turned away from the windows.

"It is possible," he admitted, "that I am old-fashioned, but I must confess I prefer to go into a house at the usual end. If a house is the wrong way up, there is every excuse for the people in it——"

A man appeared through a door at the far end of the hall, a large thick-set man, with a good-humored face, and slightly boisterous manners. He wore white flannels and an old college blazer, and was smoking a large pipe.

"Here you are!" he exclaimed, seizing the thin man's hand with great cordiality. "My dear Copplestone, delighted to see you! And this is your friend——"

Copplestone introduced *Monsieur Dupont*. Vallon shook hands heartily.

"Expect you find the place a bit surprising?" he suggested. "Don't often come in through the roof, or go downstairs to bed, eh? You'd better have a drink while they get your things in."

He went across to a small table, and dispensed whiskies-and-sodas. Once or twice he looked rather intently at

Monsieur Dupont. Then he took up a cigarette box and offered it.

"Unusual place," he said airily. "Smart fellow the architect. Good idea, as the front door *had* to be in the roof, to build the whole house upside-down. Attics at the bottom, basement at the top. Everything you go upstairs for in an ordinary house you go downstairs for here. Bit confusing at first. Took us some time to get used——"

Another door opened, and a woman came into the hall. She was tall, and arrestingly beautiful, with dark hair, and eyes that were strangely luminous. Her face was pale, and there was a suggestion of tenseness about her.

Vallon paused quickly.

"This is my wife," he said. "Leila, you've often heard me speak of Mr. Copplestone . . ."

She gave Copplestone her hand cordially.

"Often," she smiled. "It is nice to see him at last."

"And this is his particular friend, *Monsieur Dupont*."

For an instant a look that was very like fear flashed into her eyes as they met *Monsieur Dupont's* steady gaze. Then it disappeared as she smiled again.

"I'm afraid you will both think you have come to an insane house. At first I used to feel we ought to walk about on the ceilings like flies."

Vallon laughed loudly. For a moment he stood quite still; then a burst of exuberant energy swept over him. He waved his pipe violently in the air.

"I'll tell you what!" he cried. "To celebrate your visit to an upside-down house we'll have an upside-down dinner! Everything the wrong way round. We'll start with coffee and liqueurs, and finish with soup and cocktails. I think it's a first-rate notion. And we'll have——"

His wife checked him. She had been looking closely at *Monsieur Dupont's* face.

"We must consider our guests' digestions," she said softly. "They may not be so robust as ours. *Monsieur Dupont* seems to be quite horrified at the idea."

"Nonsense!" Vallon exclaimed, with a kind of jolly intolerance. "Change is good for everyone. You leave it to me."

He seemed to be keying himself up to a state of quite unnecessary excitement. He poured himself another stiff whisky-and-soda, and drained his glass at one drink.

"I'll go and interview the cook," he laughed. "I don't know what——"

A loud high-pitched voice rose from the garden below. It was not a pleasant voice, and there was something curiously startling in its sharp suddenness.

"Vallon!" it called. "Where are you? Vallon!"

Vallon put his glass down slowly. A change had come over his face. He frowned.

"It's Crayle," he said.

There was a moment's pause.

"I'll call him up," Vallon said.

He crossed to the windows, and leaned out.

"Hullo, Crayle! Come up here. Our friends have arrived."

"Hang your friends!" the voice returned. "What's this I hear about someone calling for me this afternoon?"

"Come in," Vallon said shortly, "and we'll tell you."

He moved away from the window and went back to the others.

"Crayle's a strange fellow," he told them apologetically. "Please don't be offended at anything he says. Self-control is not his strong point. He doesn't mean to be rude. He's by way of being a bit eccentric, that's all. Don't let him bother you."

They waited. Mrs. Vallon's eyes were fixed on the door by which she had entered. She seemed to have become suddenly rigid. Vallon took another cigarette and lit it deliberately. There was an unmistakable strain.

Then a man came in so quickly that it almost seemed as if he had been exploded through the doorway.

He was of medium height and build, with a dark beard and moustache, and long, bushy, unbrushed hair. His age would have been exceedingly difficult to guess. He might have been anything

between forty and fifty. In contrast to Vallon he was dressed in a rather too well cut summer suit which imparted a certain swaggering smartness to his appearance. At the same time there was something virile and violent about him, a turbulent restless energy that seemed all the time to be calling upon him for a greater amount of self-control than he possessed.

He paused at sight of Copplestone and *Monsieur Dupont*.

"Hullo," he said, "didn't know you were in here when I called that out. Apologize, of course. If that's whisky I'll have some."

Vallon mixed him a drink. Both Copplestone and *Monsieur Dupont* were conscious of a vague antagonism in the man's glance. He took his glass, drank, and helped himself to a cigarette.

"Well," he asked, with a suggestion of sharpness, "who came to see me?"

"My wife saw him," Vallon replied. "She'll tell you."

Leila Vallon hesitated for a moment.

"It was a man in an old grey flannel suit," she said slowly, "and a dirty felt hat. I found him at the top of the steps as I was going out after lunch, about half an hour after you and Dick had gone in the car to Kendal. I didn't like the look of him at all."

"Did he give his name?" Crayle asked.

She shook her head.

"No. He simply inquired if you were in, and when I told him you had gone out he said he would come back later in the afternoon, and went off down the road. There was something about him and the way he spoke that quite gave me the creeps."

Crayle was looking at her very intently.

"Curious," he said. "I wonder what he wanted . . ."

"Don't you know who it was?" Vallon asked.

Crayle emptied his glass, and put it down. The expression of his face was not very pleasant.

"No, I don't. I haven't the least idea. It doesn't sound like anyone I know."

"Well, you'll see if he comes again," Vallon said. He turned to the others. "Come along. I'll take you down to your rooms."

He led the way downstairs.

"Crayle will be going back to town the day after tomorrow," he said softly, "and between ourselves I'm not sorry. He's been here a week, and that's about as much as one wants of him all at once. We'll have tea in the garden. Come down as soon as you're ready."

He showed them into adjoining bedrooms two floors below, and went on down the stairs.



OPPLESTONE lingered in *Monsieur Dupont's* room for a few minutes before going into his own. *Monsieur Dupont's* face showed that peculiarly blank expression which the other knew from experience only came over it on certain occasions.

"My friend," he said gravely, "you were certainly right when you said this was a strange place."

Copplestone glanced at the door.

"I can't quite make Vallon out," he returned. "He seems a different man down here. When I've seen him in town he's always been a rather quiet sort of fellow. This boisterousness is something new to me. Of course, I told you I didn't know him very well, but he has often pressed me to come here and see his house, and so I fixed it up."

"It is not of him I am thinking," said *Monsieur Dupont* slowly, "it is of the other, the man Crayle."

"What do you make of him?" Copplestone asked.

There was silence for a moment. *Monsieur Dupont* was staring out through the open windows.

"He is," he replied, "the sixth most evil thing I have met in my life, and that is saying a great deal. He is thoroughly and completely wicked. I do not think he has a single redeeming point."

He turned away from the windows, and began to take off his coat.

"You know me well enough not to

ask my reasons for such a feeling. I follow my instincts, and they are not often mistaken. There is an atmosphere about this place that I do not understand—yet. I only know that I do not like it. Perhaps tonight we shall see what it means."

He threw his waistcoat on the bed, and loosened his tie. Copplestone went closer to him.

"Tell me," he said—"what do you think of Vallon's wife?"

Monsieur Dupont did not speak until he had taken off his collar. Then he lowered his voice.

"I think," he returned evenly, "that Mrs. Vallon knows very much more about the mysterious caller in the grey flannel suit than she has admitted. And I think, also, that if the man in grey comes back again . . . something strange will happen."

"I am beginning to wish," Copplestone said, "that we hadn't come. We don't want to be mixed up in anything unpleasant."

Monsieur Dupont shrugged his shoulders.

"All my life I have been mixed up in things that were unpleasant," he replied. "And yet, with so much experience, there are things here—" He broke off, and stared again through the windows. "The man in grey," he whispered, "there's something about him—don't you feel it too?—something that smells of treachery, of an awful sin. I wonder . . ." He stopped, suddenly clenching his hands so tightly that the veins stood out on them like cords. "*Mon dieu*, I wonder . . ."

"What?" Copplestone asked, staring at him.

An extraordinary change had come over *Monsieur Dupont*. He was tense and rigid, gazing out straight in front of him, almost like a man in a trance. Then he slowly relaxed, and turned to Copplestone a face that had on it something of the expression of one who has had a glimpse of a great horror.

"My friend," he said quietly, "an idea has occurred to me that I dare not mention even to you. It is possible that I have seen the real truth of the man in

grey and Mr. Crayle, and if so——” He sat down in an armchair, and unfastened his shoes. “You had better go to your room,” he said, without looking up. “Tea will be ready soon.”

When Copplestone had closed the door behind him, *Monsieur* Dupont lit a cigarette, and sat perfectly still in his chair. It was nearly half an hour before he got up and finished changing his clothes.

VALLON met them on the terrace. There was a look of annoyance on his face.

“I’m not at all happy about Crayle,” he said slowly. “I didn’t really pay much attention to what my wife said about the man who called to see him. She’s inclined to be nervous sometimes. But I’m afraid there is something wrong.”

He glanced round.

“I’ve just seen him at the other end of the garden talking to the man. The fellow must have come back from the opposite direction, though it’s a stiff climb of three or four miles from the nearest road that way. He was a seedy-looking customer, clean-shaven, with short hair, and he wore the dirty grey suit Leila described. I couldn’t get near enough to hear what they were saying, but they both appeared to be very angry; in fact, Crayle seemed so furious that once or twice I thought he was going for the other chap. He can be pretty violent, you know, when he loses his temper.”

“I should imagine so,” *Monsieur* Dupont agreed.

“The quarrel came to a head quickly. The other man suddenly shouted: ‘I shall come back tonight. You’ve got until then, not an hour longer.’ He went off quickly through the trees. Crayle called something after him, but he didn’t turn. Crayle stood still, and I should never have believed there could have been such an expression on his face. It was horrible. Then he turned away in another direction. I don’t know whether he’ll come for tea. Sometimes he doesn’t. I don’t like it at all.”

He turned down the terrace steps.

Monsieur Dupont stopped at the top. “Mr. Vallon,” he asked evenly, “who is this man Crayle, and why is he here in your house?”

Vallon looked back at him, surprised.

“You don’t like him?”

“I do not,” *Monsieur* Dupont declared. “To be quite frank, I very much dislike him.”

Vallon nodded.

“I’m afraid you’re right,” he said. “I don’t know much about him. I first met him at a club dinner in town, and afterwards he took a good deal of trouble to get me some information I wanted. He seemed a rather interesting and unusual character, and ultimately I asked him to come and stay here for a week. But I didn’t bargain for any trouble.”

Monsieur Dupont went down the steps on to the lawn. There was a faint, curious smile on his face.

“I expect they’ve put the tea under the trees,” Vallon said, turning to the shady side of the lawn. “Come this way.”

They found the tea tables set under the shade of a great tree. Mrs. Vallon was waiting for them. She seemed to be even paler than before, and the strained look was fixed in her eyes. Vallon glanced at her anxiously, but she did not look at him.

“I do not know where Mr. Crayle is,” she said. “Perhaps he doesn’t want any tea.”

Monsieur Dupont was the only one who saw the slight movement among the trees at the far end of the lawn.

“I think,” he said, “that he is coming now.”

They all turned. Crayle came slowly toward them.

“By Jove,” Vallon said, “he looks quite cheerful!”

There was a new jauntiness in the man’s manner. He was smiling.

“Tea in the garden!” he exclaimed. “An excellent idea! Let me assist. I feel I must do something to——”

“Please don’t trouble,” Vallon said, rather shortly. “Sit down. We can all help ourselves.”

Crayle laughed.

"A first-rate motto," he declared. "And one that I entirely agree with—particularly when such excellent things are provided to help ourselves to. I am going to make——"

"I am afraid," *Monsieur Dupont* said quietly, "that Mrs. Vallon is not well."

She was leaning back in her chair. Her eyes were closed. She seemed to be almost fainting.

Vallon bent over her.

"My dear . . ." he said gently.

She pulled herself together with a great effort. Her hand closed tightly on his.

"I'm all right," she said weakly. "Please don't worry about me. It's only the heat. Let me rest for a moment."

Crayle helped himself to cake.



IN THE dining-room at the top of the house the upside-down dinner was a strange meal. Vallon laid himself out to invest it with a boisterous jollity, and was supported by Crayle. Mrs. Vallon had recovered herself, and joined in with a rather feverish gaiety.

"I feel like a pioneer," Vallon declared, "like an explorer in an unknown country—only much braver than most explorers. Tomorrow, probably, I shall only feel ill."

"You will be lucky," Crayle laughed, "if you don't feel ill *before* tomorrow. I am afraid *Monsieur Dupont's* digestion is not very happy even now."

Monsieur Dupont looked down gravely at his plate.

"It is not," he returned, "my digestion which is unhappy, it is my conscience. I do not feel like an explorer, I feel like a sinner. And a sinner who is committing a very dangerous sin."

Vallon looked at the stiff back of the butler, who was moving away from the table.

"I am quite sure Benson agrees with you," he said. "To begin with port and end with martinis must represent to him the very depth of human iniquity."

"It probably is," said *Monsieur Dupont*.

The curious meal drew to a close, or perhaps it would be truer to say to a beginning. Vallon's laughter grew louder and more strained, and Crayle seemed to be watching him with sardonic amusement. They drank their cocktails and got up from the table, strolling down on to the lawn.

The evening was hot and sultry. In the distance occasional flashes of lightning flickered above a bank of cloud, and the roll of thunder followed. Not a breath of air stirred to relieve the oppressive closeness.

A white-faced woman walked up and down under the trees. Her hands were pressed together. Terror was in her eyes. Vallon put a hand gently on her arm. She stopped.

"Leila . . . I think you are the bravest woman in the world."

She did not speak. She was as still as a figure of stone.

"I love you," he whispered. "I love you tonight more than I've ever loved you before. For God's sake don't give way."

She said nothing. He turned, and disappeared into the darkness. She stood where he left her, without a movement. A brighter flash of lightning lit up her bloodless face. She heard voices from the other side of the lawn, and saw the dark shapes of two men coming towards her.

"*Monsieur Dupont* . . ."

Monsieur Dupont's voice was even lower than hers.

"Mrs. Vallon, you are very nervous tonight. What is the matter?"

Even in the darkness she felt that his eyes were searching her. She controlled herself with a supreme effort.

"Yes . . . I am nervous."

"Of what?" asked *Monsieur Dupont* gently.

She came closer to him.

"That man—the man who came for Mr. Crayle—I'm afraid of him."

"Why should you be afraid of him?" said *Monsieur Dupont* steadily.

She shivered.

"He frightened me. I'm afraid . . . of

what may happen if he comes again tonight."

Again the thunder rolled sullenly. *Monsieur* Dupont waited until it had died away.

"You mean you think it possible that Mr. Crayle——"

Another shudder ran through her.

"You don't know him. He can be terrible. If you'd seen him——" She checked herself, and turned a little away from them.

"Where is he now?" Coppelstone asked.

"I don't know," she said. "He walked away alone when we came out. He didn't want anyone with him . . ."

There was silence for a moment.

When she spoke again her voice was firmer.

"I'm going in," she said. "Come when you're ready."

She went past them to the house.

Monsieur Dupont took another cigarette from his case, and lit it deliberately. In the light of the match, Coppelstone could see that his face was very grave.

"I am beginning," Coppelstone confessed, "to have an uncomfortable feeling down my spine."

The whole night seemed to be full of a heavy unnamed menace. *Monsieur* Dupont puffed at his cigarette with mechanical regularity.

"Half . . ." he muttered. "I can see half . . ." He made an impatient gesture. "I told you I knew the truth of the man in grey, but I can't make it fit. I can't see into the other half. If only I could, I should know what was going to happen."

He passed a hand across his forehead with a helpless movement.

"We had better go in," he said.

The library door was open. Vallon was writing a letter. He looked up.

"Go into the drawing-room," he said. "I'll come along in a few minutes. If you like music, get my wife to play for you. She's a wonderful pianist."

"That would be delightful," said *Monsieur* Dupont.

ELEVEN o'clock struck. Mrs. Vallon sat at the piano. She had been playing magnificently.

Vallon opened the door, and stopped, looking round.

"Hullo, hasn't Crayle come in?"

"We haven't seen him," Coppelstone replied.

Vallon hesitated.

"Perhaps he's gone to his room. He doesn't care for music. I think I'll look in and see."

He went out. Mrs. Vallon played again. *Monsieur* Dupont leaned back in his chair, watching her with a kind of tense fascination. She played as if inspired, gazing out straight in front of her with wide eyes. Her white set face might have been cut in marble.

Vallon came in again quickly.

"I say, I don't know what on earth's happened. I'm afraid Crayle's bolted."

Monsieur Dupont sat up in his chair suddenly.

"Bolted?" he repeated sharply.

"I've just been to his room," Vallon said, "and found his dress clothes on the bed. It looks as if he'd slipped in, changed, and gone off."

An expression of horror was dawning on *Monsieur* Dupont's face. His hands were gripping the arms of his chair.

"Changed his clothes," he muttered slowly. "Changed . . ."

Vallon looked worried and anxious.

"He must have gone. The things he wore at dinner are all there on the bed."

For a moment no one moved. A strange stillness held them.

"Look here!" Vallon exclaimed. "It looks bad. I'm sure something's happened."

"Why should he change his clothes?" Coppelstone asked blankly.

"That's it," Vallon returned.

"That's what worries me. I can't think why—unless——" He broke off quickly. "Suppose . . . he'd met that man again . . . and done something that made him run back, get into some ordinary clothes, and disappear as quickly as he could . . ."

Monsieur Dupont got up from his chair.

"Mr. Vallon," he said, "you are suggesting that Crayle may have murdered the man in the grey suit?"

Vallon shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know what to suggest—but I do know I'm going out to search the garden. And I'm going first to the place where I saw them talking this afternoon. I should like you and Copplestone to come too."

Monsieur Dupont nodded.

"Certainly. We will both come."

Vallon turned back to the door. "We've got some electric torches somewhere. I'll tell Benson to bring them."

He hurried out of the room. Leila Vallon rose slowly from the piano.

Copplestone turned to her.

"Mrs. Vallon," he said gently, "you had better stay here."

She shook her head. She was trembling.

"I'm coming." Her voice was hardly above a whisper. "I can't stay here alone. I *must* come."

THEY went downstairs, and out into the garden. The butler brought several torches, but the storm had cleared away, and the white light of the moon made the night almost as bright as day. Vallon led the way across the lawns to the great belt of trees at the far end of the garden.

"They were standing there," he said, pausing, "between those two trees on the right . . ."

They went on a few paces.

Then there was a shout from Copplestone.

"My God! Look here!"

The body of a man lay on the grass. It was dressed in an ill-fitting suit of dirty grey flannel, shabby brown shoes, and a collar and tie that were old and frayed. The face was clean shaven, and the short hair brushed back from a high forehead gave it a sinister appearance, which the absence of several front teeth greatly increased. He had been killed by some heavy blows on the head with a sharp-edged instrument.

Mrs. Vallon uttered a sharp cry and drew back, covering her face with her hands.

"It's the same man," she shuddered, "the man who spoke to me."

"He killed him," Vallon exclaimed hoarsely. "The fool! I was afraid something would happen."

Monsieur Dupont bent down over the body, and made a rapid examination.

"He is quite dead," he said, straightening himself. "At once you must send for a doctor and the police."

"Benson will telephone," said Vallon. "It will take them some time to get here."

The butler hurried back to the house. In the silence that followed the three men stood looking down on the ground.

"It's horrible," Vallon muttered. "I wish I'd never had Crayle in the place. Anyone could have seen he was half off his head. No wonder he changed his clothes and bolted. No doubt he counted on this not being discovered until tomorrow, and expected to get out of the country in time."

Again there was silence.

Monsieur Dupont raised his head, and fixed his eyes on the dense black masses of the trees in front of him.

"Mr. Crayle has, I am sure, committed a good many crimes in his life," he said softly; "but this happens to be one of the crimes he has *not* committed!"

They all stared at him.

"*Not* committed?" Copplestone echoed.

Monsieur Dupont's voice was entirely without expression.

"It would perhaps have been better if he had," he said.

"I don't know what you mean," Vallon said. "There can't be any doubt that he committed it. His flight alone is sufficient proof. If he had nothing to do with it, why should he run away?"

"I did not say he had nothing to do with it," returned *Monsieur Dupont*. "I simply said he did not commit it. But he had a very great deal to do with it."

"The whole thing," Vallon said, rather sharply, "is perfectly plain——"

Copplestone checked him.

"Wait a moment," he said quietly. "Go on, Dupont."

Monsieur Dupont continued, in the same monotonous tone.

"We are dealing," he said, "with a very clever crime. It may sound strange to say that it is the cleverest crimes that are found out, but it is true. The unpremeditated crime of opportunity often remains unsolved. Circumstances may make the perfect crime—the human brain never can."

"It is the sort of crime I should have expected to happen," he went on. "The whole night has been upside-down. This crime is the wrong way round." He pointed to the dead man with a startling suddenness. "And *that* is the wrong way round."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Vallon exclaimed.

Monsieur Dupont gazed down steadily at the ugly thing at his feet.

"It is like the dinner," he said slowly. "When we sat round the table we were really committing a crime. I am not sure that it was not a much more serious one than this. We were deliberately violating the law and order of thousands of years. Ever since human beings have eaten food they have eaten it naturally in a certain order. Meat before pudding is so much a law of nature that it has become almost a law of God. Would one who deliberately broke such a law hesitate at the mere killing of a contemptible blackmailer?"

Vallon turned to Copplestone.

"Your friend seems to be talking nonsense," he said angrily.

"I do not think you will find it nonsense," Copplestone replied. "Until a few months ago, *Monsieur Dupont* was one of the chiefs of the French Secret Police."

A sudden stiffness seemed to come over the two people who were listening. *Monsieur Dupont* did not look at them.

"Let us apply the principles of the first crime to the second," he said evenly. "Everything that was put in front of us to eat should have been at the opposite end of the dinner. And if everything about that man in front of us there——"

A sharp exclamation came from Copplestone.

"By Jove, you mean that if instead of having short hair brushed back he had long hair not brushed at all——"

Monsieur Dupont nodded.

"You are coming to it," he said. "That is what I meant."

"And if instead of being clean shaven he had a beard and moustache——"

"And all his teeth," said *Monsieur Dupont*. "It is wonderful the difference a few missing teeth can make."

"But then," Copplestone cried, with a kind of fierce discovery, "if he had all that he might be Crayle himself."

"He might," admitted *Monsieur Dupont*. "In fact, he *is*."

There was an instant of gigantic silence. *Monsieur Dupont* kept his eyes on the ground.

"Crayle!" Copplestone shouted.

"Ridiculous!" Vallon exclaimed harshly. "How *could* it be Crayle? It's the man who spoke to my wife this afternoon—the man I saw afterwards talking to Crayle. We both recognize him."

Monsieur Dupont made no answer. His head was still bent. Copplestone stared at him in blank amazement.

"But if this is Crayle, where is the other man, in the grey suit, that Mr. and Mrs. Vallon saw?"

"Where he always has been," returned *Monsieur Dupont* quietly—"nowhere."

"Nowhere?"

The whole night seemed to hold its breath. *Monsieur Dupont's* voice dropped to an even lower key.

"There never was a man in grey. I was sure of that from the beginning. When I said I knew the truth about him I meant that I knew there was no truth about him. He was an imaginary being, created for a special purpose. I could not fathom what that purpose was."

Vallon took a step toward him. His manner had become suddenly threatening.

"What the devil do you mean?" he demanded furiously.

Monsieur Dupont continued unmoved.

"People who know me would tell you that I am a man of peculiar instincts. Experience has trained me to distinguish between the true and the false. At no time, from the first mention of him, did I believe in the man in grey."

Mrs. Vallon came slowly to her husband's side, and placed a hand gently on his arm. A change had come over her. She was perfectly composed. Vallon's arm slipped round her, and the two stood together.

Monsieur Dupont seemed unaware of her movement.

"When we first came into the house," he said, "I felt certain that some particular reason was attached to our presence. There was some plan on foot in which we were to play a part. When otherwise normal people make up their minds to some desperate act, they often keep themselves keyed up to a state of unnatural excitement to overcome the voice of conscience and maintain their determination. That was the atmosphere I sensed. The plan now is perfectly plain. Crayle was to be murdered, and for that purpose an imaginary enemy was created and described to us who were to be corroborating witnesses. It was an excellent scheme. Crayle would appear to have killed the man in grey, whose body would be found. It would be assumed that Crayle had removed all means of identification from it, and fled, and of course he would never be traced. And so Crayle was done to death; his beard and moustache were shaved off; his hair was cut and brushed; his false teeth taken out; he was dressed in old clothes—it could all be done in a few minutes—and taken out, to be found and identified as his own enemy the man in grey. I say it was an excellent scheme."

A tense pause followed. Then Mrs. Vallon broke it in a clear steady voice.

"*Monsieur Dupont*," she said slowly, "when I first saw you I was frightened of you. I felt you could see into my brain and read all my thoughts——"

"Leila," Vallon cried warningly.

But she shook her head.

"What's the use?" she returned.

"*Monsieur Dupont* sees it all."

She drew away from him, and stood alone.

"*Monsieur Dupont*," she said, "that dead man was my husband. I married him nearly ten years ago. His name was not really Crayle. He was a fiend, a monster. He delighted in cruelty. When he had spent all my money he left me and went abroad, and I heard that he was dead. A year afterwards I married again," her arms went out to Vallon, "and for two years I knew such love and happiness that in my misery I should never have believed to have been possible. Then he came back," she shuddered, "and told me he had wanted me to believe him dead, so that I might marry a rich man, and he could blackmail us. He made our lives a hell, until . . ." her voice broke, "until I was wicked enough to think of this . . ."

Vallon held her tightly in his arms.

"I thought of it," he said. "I killed him, and I haven't a scrap of remorse. He began to be suspicious this afternoon, but I pretended to give in to him and promised him more money—that was why he was suddenly cheerful. I thought our plan was safe enough—but if I had known more about *Monsieur Dupont*—" He shrugged his shoulders. "It would have been all right with the local police. There would have been a hue and cry after Crayle; they would have assumed he had got safely out of the country, and the affair would have died down. But *Monsieur Dupont* has beaten us."

He kissed his wife, and put her gently away from him.

"Well," he said, "the police will be here soon. I shan't try to get away."

Monsieur Dupont did not move. When he spoke his voice was as quiet and expressionless as before.

"Mr. Vallon," he said, "my friend Copplestone and I are subject to a curious mental complaint. We both suffer from occasional lapses of memory. When the police arrive I should not be surprised if our defective recollections fail to carry us further than the identification of the body with your description of the man in grey——"

And Mrs. Vallon fainted.

DR. EDWARD PODOLSKY



LEAVE IT TO THE DOCTOR



A series of articles explaining the part of modern medicine in crime detection.

LIVERS DON'T LIE



SEVERAL years ago in a little city in the upper part of New York State a woman was found choked to death.

The police were confronted with the problem of deciding whether the woman had hanged herself or had been strangled to death by an assailant. If the latter were true she would of course have put up a terrific struggle.

In this case there was absolutely no clue one way or the other. A suspect was picked up but, as matters stood, not much headway could be gained. An autopsy was performed, but an ordinary autopsy shows nothing in a case of this kind.

A medical expert in such matters was finally called in. The only organ he examined was the liver. This doctor performed the liver docimetric test, which consists of mashing up the liver, mixing it with lamp black and then filtering it. When the filter is clear it shows that the glycogen usually stored in the liver has disappeared. The glycogen represents muscular strength, and when a woman is being strangled to death she would put forth the last muscular effort.

In this case the filtered liquid was turbid with glycogen or liver sugar, which showed no struggle, and proved that the woman had hung herself.

The suspect was freed simply on the testimony of this "liver test."

Medical science can often procure more valuable testimony from a corpse than from any living witness.



JUNGLE CLAWS

No crook can flee the laws of Mother Nature; the jungle has its own, relentless code of tooth and fang . . . Told by an ex-crook.



DICK MANTON had an uneasy feeling that he was being watched.

The strangeness of his surroundings did nothing to lessen his sense of insecurity. He knew that somewhere above, a scorching sun was beating down upon the Malay jungle. But the light which filtered through the closely woven branches of those giant trees to touch his white sun helmet, seemed very vague and far away. It was as though he walked under the arches of some ancient tomb.

"A boneyard," he muttered to himself, "sure enough."

Trudging onward, he reached the edge of the forest. The cleared space before him had once been a garden. Brilliantly hued flowers still grew there, but they were engaged in a losing battle with the rank weeds which reached out hungrily to choke them.

At the end of a path practically obliterated by undergrowth, he saw what might have been a fine house. But neglect had left its marks. A tangled mass of creepers almost obscured the walls. Where the woodwork peeped timidly

out, he saw the peeling remains of its paint. Even the air about the sinister building seemed to breathe a warning; a more cautious man would have felt the urge to turn back. It was still possible for Dick to retrace his steps to the river, find some Malay boatman and paddle down to Penang.

But instead he strode up the path, mounted the rickety steps to the verandah and rapped smartly on the front door. Somewhat to his surprise it opened instantly.

"Whadda ya want?"

Dick surveyed the unprepossessing individual clad in greasy khaki shirt and trousers. That heavy growth of beard, those locks of jet black hair falling over bloodshot eyes did not make such a bad disguise. But it was Dick's business to penetrate disguises. He knew that he had come to the right place.

"I want to see the boss," he demanded coolly.

"What about?" The greasy man was frankly suspicious.

"I'll tell that to him," Dick replied briefly.

The man in the doorway glared, evidently in doubt as to what course to pursue. But from somewhere within the house a voice spoke up.

"Show the gentleman in, Blackie."

The greasy man stepped aside, motioning Dick to enter. Then after softly closing the door, he led the way through a hall into a spacious, dimly lighted room. The high ceilings and broad walls kept the house relatively cool. The sunlight creeping timidly through the thick vines at the windows, wrought queer patterns on the floor, in one of which Dick made out the figures of two men lounging in wicker chairs.

"What can I do for you, Mr.—?"

The speaker, who occupied the chair nearest the window, made no attempt to rise. But the precise, cultured voice sent a thrill through Dick. As his eyes grew accustomed to the dimness, he recognized the carefully shaved, aristocratic face from photographs he had seen. It was "Gentleman Charlie Burns," leader of the hold-up gang Dick was looking for.

"Dengler is my name," supplied Dick,

"and I've come here to see if we could do business with you guys. I sure hope so, for it's been a hell of a trip. The heat—whew!

"Slim Carson tipped me off—said you had some stuff for sale." He picked up a large palm leaf fan from the table and proceeded to wave it leisurely. "I know where to place it."

There followed a silence while Dick met Gentleman Charlie's stare with a cool indifference that he certainly did not feel. He knew well enough that at the slightest suspicion he would be promptly set upon and murdered. These rusty old walls would keep their secret for an eternity.

"H'm," murmured Gentleman Charlie in a speculative tone, "where did you run across Slim?"

"In Boston," Dick replied boldly. "And let me tell you I'd never have come to this lousy hole, if he hadn't let on it would mean a nice fat wad in my jeans.

"Well," admitted Gentleman Charlie, "it's good to get news of Slim, particularly as he is not what you'd call a good correspondent. We thought he was a bit rash not to join us in a temporary trip, but we are glad to hear that he is still—er—his own master. I take it you handled some of his affairs?"

Dick breathed a sigh of relief. True, Slim had sworn that he had not written to the gang after their departure from the States but the man was apt to say anything that suited his purpose at the time. Not until this moment had Dick been certain of his ground.

"Hell, yes," he answered briskly, "forty per cent is what I got for him on the face value of his bonds."

"Dengler," mused Gentleman Charlie, "Dengler—I don't seem to recall the name."

He turned to the wiry little man who sat in the chair beside him toying with a half-filled glass. "What about it, Gat?"

"New one on me," muttered Gat, staring fixedly at Dick.

"My name," grunted Dick, "is my own affair. I'm making you birds an offer—take it or leave it."

Gat and Blackie nodded their ap-

proval. Evidently they felt that Slim was no squealer. Possibly, also, they were growing restive in their isolated retreat. Real money and bright lights held a lasting allure.

But Gentleman Charlie was made of cannier stuff.

"How do we know," he inquired blandly, "that this little story of yours is true? What proof have we that you ever did know Slim?"

Dick was ready for this. During various conversations after Slim's arrest, it had become evident that the gangster felt his mob had discriminated against him. After all, ten thousand dollars in bonds was a mightily small share of two hundred thousand.

"Read this," suggested Dick as he produced a letter from his pocket.

Gentleman Charlie read the missive carefully.

"Seems straight enough," he conceded, as he passed the letter to his companion. "Slim gives you the O.K."

Gat and Blackie barely scanned the letter; impatience had quite overcome their caution. For some moments their leader surveyed them thoughtfully; then he turned to Dick.

"Forty per cent is too low," he stated flatly.

Dick's heart leaped at the words. Now the trio had accepted him as one of their own! But not a muscle of his face betrayed the elation he felt. He began to bargain shrewdly.

"Forty-seven per cent," Gentleman Charlie agreed at last. He arose and departed down the hallway to return presently with a sheaf of crackling papers.

"Never put all your eggs in one basket," he remarked to the room in general. His eyes, however, directed full at Dick, held a sardonic gleam. "Here are twenty one-thousand dollar bonds, Mr. Dengler. After we see what you can do with them, we'll talk about the rest."

Dick glanced covertly at Gat and Blackie. To them this scheme could only mean useless delay, it was unnecessary caution. As he expected, they scowled. But hard and reckless as they were, awe of their leader held them silent.

"Suits me," shrugged Dick as he extended his hand for the bonds. "I'll take them to the postoffice in Penang."

Gentleman Charlie shook his head.

"No need to trouble you with that," he suggested politely. "You just drop a line to your friend in the States. We'll enclose it in an envelope with the bonds and Blackie will register it in Penang. Then while we're waiting, you will be our guest."

Our guest! The words sent a sudden chill down Dick's spine. But three pairs of eyes were scrutinizing him; he dared raise no objection.

"O.K. by me," he agreed. "I'm in no hurry if you're not."

Dick wrote the letter, addressing it so that he knew it would reach its destination.

AFTER they had seen Blackie off for Penang with the envelope clutched in his grimy hand, Gentleman Charlie yawned.

"What do you say," he suggested, "to a bit of a stroll? I'm rather tired of loafing around the house."

The two stepped out into the brilliant sunshine, passing through the weed-grown garden and on down a long avenue of fine trees until they reached a group of natives, who were busily engaged in tapping the bark of the trees, and arranging little cups to catch the milk rubber as it oozed out. A man attired in stained white shirt and canvas trousers slouched out from a shaded nook.

"This is Reed, our overseer—tells me we're going to have an unusually prosperous season."

The man grinned slyly, nodding his head in assent. Glancing at the pale yellow face shaded by a drooping straw hat, Dick decided that Reed was a half-breed, probably a first class double-crosser, but too weak to be of any real danger. Perhaps he was well pleased to remain away from towns like Penang, where the police were too much in evidence for his comfort.

After some desultory conversation, Gentleman Charlie led the way back to the house. But as they parted from the

labor gang, Dick surprised an exchange of glances between his host and the overseer, Reed. Unless Dick was very much mistaken, his every move would be watched in the future by native eyes. As they reached the verandah once more, Gentleman Charlie paused significantly.

"Carry rather heavy artillery, don't you, Dengler?" he inquired. "That shoulder holster sticks out like a sore thumb."

Dick became aware of Gat's presence at his back. What should he do? He could draw against Gentleman Charlie, but being sandwiched in between the two gangsters, one of them would surely get him the instant he made an aggressive move. He might try to stall. But then the suspicions of his companions would have free rein.

No, that wouldn't do; he must quiet their doubts by some grandstand play.

"It's a fine rod," he laughed, as if Gentleman Charlie had just delivered himself of an excellent joke. "No use in lugging it, though—when I'm safe with the mob."

With steady fingers he unfastened the holster, handing the weapon to his host.

"Look it over," he suggested, "and if you like it, keep it. I can always get another."

Gentleman Charlie accepted the gift without remark, but Dick saw that his gesture had made a favorable impression. Gat slapped him on the back, grinning with genuine heartiness.

"You're O.K., guy," he announced. "Let's go in and have a drink."

A Malay house boy appeared with a generous supply of gin slings, the famous drink of the tropics, and the party settled down to a festive afternoon. When the gangsters began to boast of the past jobs they had "pulled," Dick felt that he had dissipated the last grain of suspicion.

But where were the rest of the bonds? Though he felt he must proceed cautiously if he wished to gain the full confidence of these men, Dick could ill afford to let many days slip by. After a certain time had elapsed the gang would begin to wonder why the money for the first bond shipment had not arrived. There

was another danger too. Slim Carson was a type that could vacillate with surprising rapidity. Suppose he should suffer a sudden change of heart? He might find means to warn his friends; it had been done before.

With these possibilities in mind, Dick tried to bring the conversation around to the bonds, hoping he might catch a lead from some stray remark. But when, some hours later, the mob rose and wandered off, Dick had to admit with chagrin that he had learned nothing of any value.

As soon as the men passed out of hearing, he looked sharply around the room, his air of lassitude vanished. The room seemed to contain nothing but a few pieces of dilapidated furniture. The inner walls were made of thin wooden strips. No chance of the bonds being hidden there.

Hearing Gentleman Charlie's voice out in the garden, Dick stepped into the hall. Like most tropical houses, this one was a bungalow. A door on his right opened into the dining room, which contained a large table and several chairs. As he slipped cautiously along the broad hallway, he spied another open door. Clothes were scattered carelessly about in this room; evidently one of the gang slept there.

The hall was an L shaped affair, and as he turned the corner he stumbled, making a sharp scraping sound. Instantly a door at the end of the passage opened. Gat confronted him, scowling.

"Thish—thish helluva place you got," grumbled Dick. He rested an arm against the wall, as though having difficulty in balancing himself. "Shlip around like skating rink. You birds finished *all* the hooch an' I'm—I'm looking 'round for anuzza drink, see?"

Gat peered at him suspiciously for a moment; then his face relaxed into a grin.

"You go up front again, Dengler," he advised, "an' I'll tell the 'boy' to serve 'em up. But listen! You ain't supposed to wander around too damn much—except where Charlie gives the O.K. He may get sore. Understand?"

Dick nodded heavily, then staggered

up the hall again. A close shave that time! Deciding it would be better not to rush matters, he spent the rest of the day lounging about the front room and verandah. But it proved a tense business. Suppose, by any chance, this group of cutthroats should discover his real identity—Dick Manton, U. S. Post Office Inspector!

A sweet thought. It sent little chills chasing up and down his spine. But the next instant his jaw tightened uncompromisingly. When they had stolen those bonds back in the U. S. A., the gang had murdered the small-town postmaster who guarded them.

Twenty years or more had passed since that postmaster, old Silas Harper, had rummaged in his pockets for licorice drops which tow-headed Dickie Manton craved.

"Well, I guess your Ma'll forgive me this time, son."

Then as Dick grew older—

"Now that you're gettin' to be a big boy, son, there's one thing you always got to remember, an' that's *duty*. May not be awful pleasant sometimes, but it's the difference between a man and a quitter."

Dick had remembered those words. A red blur had clouded his stare when four months ago he had read the report of the old man's death.

Ten minutes after reading that notice, Dick Manton had entered the office of his chief. When the door closed behind him he was "on the case." Weeks of steady toil had brought their reward. Slim Carson had been captured and persuaded to "squeal." Now—

This inactivity was worse than tedious, it was maddening; his fingers itched to curl around a pistol, to leap suddenly in front of that dirty gang and shout, "You murdered the best friend I ever had, you dirty killers. Now take what's coming to you!"

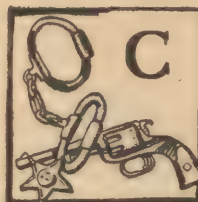
In this mood diversion of some kind was a necessity. Next morning he eagerly welcomed Gentleman Charlie's suggestion of a hunt in the jungle.

"I want to knock over some plandoks. Ever see them, Dengler? They're dwarf Malay deer about seven or eight inches

high, and they make the most wonderful steaks you ever tucked away."

Blackie had not as yet returned from Penang, and as Gat proclaimed himself too lazy to move, Dick set off alone with Gentleman Charlie and the house boy, Hussein.

"That brown boy will show you a good time; knows the woods like nobody's business," confided Gat as he languidly watched the trio depart.



LAD only in sarong and broad brimmed straw hat, Hussein led the way along devious jungle trails. The air was breathlessly hot and Dick envied the native his easy, tireless stride. Once the latter stopped to point at the ground.

"Ellifants," he grinned in broken English.

"Are they near?" asked Dick eagerly.

"No, not near. Pass yesterday."

They halted at the edge of a little clearing. At a sign from Hussein the two white men crouched noiselessly in the bushes.

"He's going to drum for game," whispered Gentleman Charlie. "Some deer will think it a challenge from another and will come into the open. Watch!"

Hussein produced two short sticks from the folds of his sarong, found a broad leaf and began to drum upon it with a whirring sound. For a moment he paused to listen, then he began to drum again. The operation was repeated several times without result. Dick was beginning to wonder whether this strange method of hunting would ever succeed, when suddenly his eyes opened wide in astonishment.

Flitting like a shadow, a tiny brown form emerged from a mass of tangled creepers into the clearing. It was a man, a savage not more than four feet tall, and naked except for a bark breech cloth. His mud-caked hair fell in snaky strands to his shoulders.

The pygmy paused as though listening intently. His glance darted from side to side with rapier-like swiftness. Either

he had taken Hussein's warning as a sign that a deer was nearby, or he had interpreted it as some kind of signal from his tribesmen. His expression was puzzled.

"Stick 'em up!" Gentleman Charlie's harsh voice rang out in a tone that Dick had not heard him use before. "Stand where you are!"

For an instant the little savage stood as though frozen in his tracks; then he leaped for cover.

A rifle shot split the silence. As though in a daze Dick watched the little brown man crumple to the ground and heard his host's satisfied chuckle.

"I've been hoping for a look at one of these pygmies," he said coolly. "They're real curiosities."

Followed by the others, he stepped into the open grass toward the fallen native, who struggled to a sitting position and reached a hand toward a bamboo quiver hanging at his side.

Gentleman Charlie grunted, raising his rifle again.

But Dick, sickening at this murderous sport, leaped forward and struck the weapon aside just as Gentleman Charlie pulled the trigger.

There was a tense pause; the gangster's stare was very cold.

"Why so hasty, Dengler?" he inquired slowly. "That coffee colored runt is nothing to us, and with that damn blow-pipe beside him, he might get nasty."

Dick's fury was so great that he would have given anything in the world to fly at the killer's throat. But he had an assignment to carry out, a mission which he could see his sudden action had already jeopardized. His host's friendliness had dwindled perceptibly.

"He's a human being," choked Dick, "and wounded at that. I didn't come out here to hunt this kind of game."

He swung abruptly on his heel and approached the little man, who now sat quietly regarding him with a wooden, expressionless gaze.

Dick examined the injury, discovering that the bullet had passed only through the fleshy part of the calf. As he ripped off his shirt to prepare a bandage, he heard Hussein's excited tones.

"You do dangerous thing, *tuan*," he chattered to Gentleman Charlie. "These *orangs* (bushmen) never forget. They have many blow-pipes with poisoned darts. We better go quick!"

Gentleman Charlie laughed, but there was an uneasy note in his merriment. Dick remembered that although the gangster was credited with many killings, the victims had always been caught unprepared. Gentleman Charlie was not noted for taking unnecessary chances.

Dick tied the last knot on the bandage and got to his feet.

"What about this chap?" he demanded. "We can't leave him here."

"It is better, *tuan*," advised Hussein. "His friends come soon; he not want to come with us. Let us go quick."

Though loath to leave the wounded savage, Dick was inclined to agree with Hussein. The little fellow would have more confidence in the ministrations of his own kind. So Dick hastened after the others, who had already started. Glancing back over his shoulder, he saw the *orang* still regarding him with the same fixed, expressionless stare.

BLACKIE was back from Penang, and immediately upon the return of the hunting party the three gangsters went into conference.

Left to his own devices, Dick grew restless. He realized that his abrupt interference with Gentleman Charlie's "sport," had incurred the personal enmity of the gangster. The latter undoubtedly would use his cunning to sow fresh seeds of suspicion in the minds of his followers, so the inspector's plan of slowly gaining his jailors' confidence was shattered. He must discover some quicker method of locating the bonds.

While he struggled to devise a new plan, the three gangsters trooped into the room, calling loudly for drinks. When Hussein padded softly in with a tray, Dick surprised a strange expression on his face. Was there horror in the brief glance the house boy flashed at Gentleman Charlie?

Dick accepted the proffered glass. But he must keep a clear head! The slightest hint of his real identity would

mean death for him then and there, but he dared not risk their displeasure by refusing to join them in a drink.

He sipped the liquid slowly, but the others, draining one glass after another, grew loquacious. For awhile they took turns boasting about gang wars and crimes of varying degrees. Tiring of this, they finally drifted into talk of the present bond "deal."

Gat turned with one of his quick, nervous movements.

"When'll we get the cash, Dengler?" he barked. "None of us wants to stick here any longer than we have to."

Dick hesitated.

"Oh, maybe five or six weeks," he replied cautiously. "It's hard to say."

"Five or six weeks!" roared Blackie. "Let me tell you somethin', guy. You'll have to move a damn sight quicker than that or—" He left the sentence unfinished, but there was a world of meaning in his look.

Listening to the gangster, an idea flashed across Dick's mind. He would meet these men on their own ground, match their bragging with his own.

"Hell," he spat disgustedly, "you birds give me a pain. If you think you can work any quicker, go ahead and do it. Peddle the stuff yourselves!"

He paused to note the effect of his suggestion. That his audience was much taken aback, was evident. Undoubtedly they knew that the dumping of a large number of stolen bonds on the market was no simple matter.

"And another thing," scoffed Dick, "I'm beginning to wonder if you birds aren't just a bunch of pikers anyway. You slip me a bit of chicken feed to sell and then do nothing but stall. I don't believe you have anything more on tap than hot air."

This taunt struck home; it was too much for the vanity of the gang. Gentleman Charlie snorted and staggered down the hall to return presently with a large brief case. This he unfastened, emptying its contents on the table.

"Pikers, eh?" he coughed triumphantly. "How about that?"

So the bonds were right in the house! Not buried or otherwise concealed in some difficult hiding place! Dick understood now why one of the gangsters always remained at home when the others went out.

"Well," he acknowledged in a tone which indicated reluctant admiration, "I guess I sized you birds up wrong—you've got the goods, all right."

Gentleman Charlie stuffed the bonds back into the brief case and disappeared into the hall once more, while Gat and Blackie gazed at Dick complacently. Dick's ruse having proved successful, his mind went forward to the next step—the capture of the gang. His present situation was far from encouraging. He was unarmed, but even with a weapon his chances of using it would have been slim, for the gangsters had been constantly on the alert. His one opportunity lay in notifying the Penang police. But how? He felt certain that his every move was watched.

Hearing the shuffle of feet in the hall, he glanced over his shoulder to discover Reed, the half-breed overseer, standing in the doorway. The fellow mumbled a casual remark about some work to be done outside, but Dick sensed that he had something more important on his mind. Evidently of the same opinion, Blackie pulled himself out of his chair and joined Reed in the doorway. After one or two low-toned remarks, the pair retreated down the hallway in the direction of Gentleman Charlie's room. A moment later Gat followed suit.

For a few moments Dick beat a restless tattoo upon the arm of his chair. What should he do?

Then there came a soft padding of feet behind him. Turning, he found that Hussein had come with a tray to remove the empty glasses.

"Ah, Hussein—" he murmured. And then he remembered the way in which the house boy had looked at Gentleman Charlie. Here was a bare chance.

"I feel afraid," he confided softly, "much afraid. Tuan Charlie do bad thing this morning."

The house boy glanced up quickly; there was genuine terror in his eyes.

"Orangs," he muttered, "they never forget. Kill us all."

Dick could have shouted with relief. Little persuasion was needed and in whispered tones he struck his bargain. Hussein would slip off at once for Penang, carrying to the police superintendent a note which Dick scribbled as he talked. In exchange, the house boy would not only escape from a household which he now considered doomed, but would receive a handsome reward as well.

The native had barely departed when the gangsters came back into the room. It seemed to Dick that their expression was peculiar as they looked at him.

"Reed says there are elephants nearby," Gentleman Charlie announced jubilantly. "I've never had a crack at one, so Gat and I are going to try our luck. How about joining us?"

So that was the reason the gangsters had all stared at him! They were excited at the idea of an elephant hunt. Or perhaps they had mistaken his "soft-heartedness" of the morning for cowardice and wanted to test his nerve? At any rate, he could think of no excuse for staying in the house. Besides the hunt would help to pass the time until the police arrived.



GENTLEMAN Charlie brought out some high-powered hunting rifles, which Reed loaded hurriedly and distributed among the members of the party. Then he led the way outdoors, and on into the jungle.

The trail was fresh. The party moved rapidly through a corridor of broken trees, where orchids and other tropical plants had been trampled into the damp earth, leaving an aroma that was sickeningly sweet.

After covering perhaps a mile, the sound of crashing branches indicated that the elephants were close at hand.

Reed motioned the others to proceed noiselessly, and in a few moments they spied the herd of gigantic beasts.

The elephants were moving slowly

across a clearing, diagonally toward the hunters. Reed stopped at the edge of the bushes to arrange the disposition of his forces. Dick was to remain crouched in his present position, while the two gangsters would move off to take positions on the flanks. As the animals approached, Reed would attempt to maneuver one or more into position for the shot.

As the other men slipped away, the herd gradually approached. Their long trunks swung from side to side, occasionally curling upward to rip the tender shoots from nearby trees. Reed had said the largest was a full grown bull, and there were two smaller bulls accompanied by several cows and their young. At a distance they all seemed big enough, but at close quarters they were terrifyingly enormous. Dick's heart began to pound; certainly the zoos at home had never enclosed anything equal to these mud-caked monsters. He was painfully aware of the absence of any iron fence between him and the lumbering beasts.

For awhile he thought they had discovered him, but then he remembered that a slight breeze was blowing from the opposite direction. They could not possibly have caught his scent.

The herd began to swing away, but almost at once from somewhere in the forest Reed began to shout lustily. The elephants moved their ponderous heads from side to side, as though puzzled at the strange sound. The big bull turned in Dick's direction and began to walk slowly toward him. Dick could tell by the sound of the overseer's voice that he was well back in the trees, but Reed's position was such that he and the giant bull were in a straight line, with Dick in the center.

Dick was a novice at big game hunting. He supposed this was Reed's method of attracting an elephant so that the plantation's "guest" might have first shot. But as the big beast loomed nearer, Dick wished the overseer had used a different arrangement.

Just then he heard the leaves rustle in a clump of bushes on his right. It was very faint, caused by a gentle breeze perhaps, yet it seemed to him that he was

being watched by unseen eyes. Maybe Gat or Gentleman Charlie had approached in order to get a better shot at the animals. But as he turned his head for a quick glance, his eyes widened in surprise. He had caught the flash of a naked brown body.

Reed was shouting again, and as he did so the big elephant increased his pace. Dick decided to wait no longer. Raising his rifle, he took careful aim between the eyes of the beast; then pulled the trigger.

He heard a faint snap, very much like the sound made by a Chinese firecracker, but the cartridge failed to explode.

As he ejected it hurriedly and aimed again, he saw that the big bull had located him. The latter raised his ears until they stood out from his head like twin fans, then trumpeting with rage, he charged.

Again Dick pulled the trigger. As he did so, he was swept by a sickening feeling of realization. The bullets had been removed from the cartridges, leaving only useless caps!

There was no time for another shot, even if Dick had so desired. The great animal was almost upon him. Flinging his rifle at the charging brute, he leaped aside just in time, landing in a bed of ferns. An ominous sound sent him to his feet like lightning. He ran clear, while over the spot he had just left, the whole herd crashed into the jungle after their leader. They were charging blindly, destroying everything in their path.

Scrambling, dodging, leaping, in order to escape that devastating charge, Dick lost all sense of direction. But now that the great animals had passed, leaving only clouds of dust and broken bushes in their wake, he glanced around to find himself standing in the clearing where——

"You spoiled the show that time," a voice spoke up suddenly.

Dick turned to discover Gentleman Charlie standing at the edge of the undergrowth close beside him. The gangster was holding his rifle carelessly crooked under one arm. His position indicated that he had been well clear of the elephant rush.

"Reed brought in an interesting

message this afternoon," he continued in an even tone. "Slim Carson very kindly cabled that the postoffice inspectors had located our retreat. We know you're a dick, Dengler. Your number is up."

So this was the end! In another moment Dick would go the way of Silas Harper. Something must be done, and done fast. But what? Gentleman Charlie was already leveling his rifle.

"They've got you, Charlie!" shouted Dick, pointing into the trees. "The *orangs* haven't forgotten what you did this morning."

He could see no sign of life in the forest; it was merely a timeworn trick. But he remembered Hussein's warning to the gangster that morning, and he remembered the startled look on the latter's face.

Gentleman Charlie whirled suddenly. It was not a full turn of the body, just a movement of head and shoulders as though to satisfy himself that his uneasiness was groundless.

But Dick was ready. As though launched from a catapult he sprang, bearing Gentleman Charlie to the ground.

Instantly the two men were a writhing mass of arms and legs. They twisted and turned in a desperate battle for possession of Gentleman Charlie's rifle. Dick had the advantage of surprise, but the gangster was fighting for his life. He bit and clawed like a madman until finally Dick's youth and strength began to tell. Slowly, gaspingly his opponent began to weaken. In another moment——

"Drill that skunk!" a voice shouted nearby. "Shoot, Gat—What the hell are you waiting for?"

"Get up closer! We've got to see which is which!"

Making one last desperate effort, Dick drove a fist against Gentleman Charlie's jaw and, as the gangster collapsed, snatched the rifle from his hands.

As he struggled to his feet he saw that Gat and Reed were running across the clearing toward him. Another man was breaking through the underbrush—Blackie, evidently anxious to be in at the finish. As Dick raised his rifle, he saw

the three men do likewise. He might get one, but the other two—

What had happened? Was he dreaming? He heard Gat's gun roar, but the bullet went wild. The gangster suddenly clutched at his throat. Blackie shouted hoarsely, spinning around to fire wildly into an apparently harmless forest. Then he too began clawing himself like a madman. Reed made a sudden dash for cover. Halfway across the clearing he dropped writhing to the ground.

Half dazed, Dick watched the strange antics of those men who a moment ago were preparing to kill him. He saw them twist and turn, heard a choking cry, a scream of terror, and presently the killers were lying as though carved from stone.

What had happened? Was it some sort of plague, a monstrous joke or what?

Gentleman Charlie lay closer than any of his fellows. Was he too afflicted by this strange malady? Or would he revive and launch a sudden attack? Holding his rifle ready for instant action, Dick crept slowly toward the motionless gangster and bent over to examine him. The body was literally covered with tiny darts, similar to the ones which the little brown orang had carried in his quiver.

Inspecting the other crumpled bodies, Dick saw that the entire gang had met the same fate. As he raised his eyes slowly to scan the jungle, he saw a flash of brown. Or did he? The movement was so swift and silent that he could not be sure. Even the breeze had died so that the leaves lay motionless on the trees. Masses of ferns and creepers rose in walls that hinted of unfathomable mystery beyond. The jungle was shielding its own.

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GUN GIRL

When lead spits from ambush, and death leers from every tree, the North woods are a grand place for a vacation—not! . . . Told by a U. S. Immigration man.



inch and fired point blank!

There was a puff of smoke, a stinging pain in my leg, a gust of rage that the earth should rise up and strike me—and blackness.

From the blackness came that singing sensation of whirling back from long distances—falling, falling.

FOR an instant I caught a flash of wild dark beauty, with that black hair that goes with glowing cheeks. Then the girl in the window swung the rifle another

I opened my eyes and turned.

Stabbing pains shot through me. For a moment I forgot to care where I was.

Then slowly I took in the details—the ferns and wild blackberries on the ground by me, the tall fir trees overhead, and, through the underbrush, the rude log cabin.

Slowly memory came back.

Why had the girl shot me!

I had caught only a glimpse of her face, but I was positive I'd never seen the girl before. A man wouldn't forget her face. If she wanted me dead, why hadn't she finished her job?

A burning thirst consumed me. Anything was better than this.

I dragged toward the cabin, watching warily.

The pain burned. There was a hushed stillness in the air. I wanted to shout and curse. Another stab of pain——

To hell with them all anyway!

I sat up and examined my leg gingerly. There was a clean shot through the calf, just above my mountain boot. Not bad to look at, but awful to feel!

A fine fool I was to've lied to Canby——

I'd thought I was smart to do it because every vacation I'd started on for five years had been spoiled by some special trouble coming up that called me back. I figured the only way to get a vacation was to go where I couldn't be found.

Canby worked Prohi and I worked Immigration. While our Chiefs weren't always in accord, he and I were close friends and a lot of our work dove-tailed. We wised each other on anything breaking.

We'd both left Seattle together, though he was on his way to Bellingham.

"It's a hot tip," he had told me. "And there might be something in it for you. We're hoping to nail Logan with the goods—track down his layout."

"Not this homo! It'll be fish and berries I'll be hunting for two weeks, not men. Haven't even got a gun with me. I'll camp and rough it through the mountains." Then I lied smoothly, "I'm making Snoqualmie Pass on foot."

"You're sure set on your vacation," he grinned, "if you're willing to pass up a chance to land Logan behind the bars."

"H'm," I'd grunted. "What do tips on Logan ever come to? You know, and I know, and the whole country knows that he and his gang are running stuff across the Border wholesale; but do we ever get him with the goods? My idea of a tip on Logan is that it's the one spot where nobody's going to find him!"

We'd parted good-naturedly; but when I reached the fork, I left the Snoqualmie Pass trail, and cut north into that of the Upper Basin, heading pretty straight

into the Cascade Mountains. I had a good grin over it, because anybody looking for me would head for the Pass, and for once I was anticipating a real vacation.

My joy in the whole lark made me careless. I missed the faint trail after I forded one of the numerous streams at the end of six hours climbing. Breaking for higher ground to get my bearings, I stumbled on this cabin—and got shot for my pains.

I crawled on toward the cabin again. The place looked deserted.

I worked my way over the rude sill. Then I heaved a sigh of relief. On the halved log that served for a table were a basin and a pitcher of water. A clean towel lay neatly folded beside them. Antiseptic and absorbent cotton too.

I halloed, but no one answered.

I felt faint, but I washed and bound my wound the best I could. Then crawled to a pile of hemlock boughs in one corner. Blackness came down.

IT WAS real darkness that my eyes opened on next.

I felt myself watched. I lay still.

Moments pounded on, while unknown dangers lurking in the shadows held me tense.

Suddenly a crashing bombardment sounded on the roof. It was different from any sound I'd ever heard.

I started up.

A hand reached out of the darkness and pushed me back.

"Sh! It's the rocks!" a woman whispered close to my ear.

My hair froze. Unearthly screams seemed to come out of the very clouds themselves.

The screams died away, and something scampered through the underbrush close to the cabin.

Long moments passed. I shivered, then felt that tense presence beside me and tried to lie quiet.

Another mad shriek wailed through the darkness—another and another. Sinister rustlings of stealth seemed closer. Before I could move, the cabin rocked again with the bombardment on the roof.

The terror of the unknown held me through the long silence that followed.

Then the shrieking came again. Something crashed through the roof.

I pulled myself up. Strong arms pushed me back. The whole thing was uncanny. I lay there like a baby.

Dawn crept through the chinks before that uproar finally stopped, though the silences were much longer than the attacks.

The woman groped her way to the window. She threw down the bars that boarded it, and let in the light. Then she faced me.

She was the same girl!

"Well, that's over," she said, and sighed.

I pulled myself up. It was like coming out of a nightmare.

"That may be over, but this isn't. Will you tell me what the devil I'm doing with a bullet through my leg?"

"That? Oh that!" She shrugged her shoulders. "I put that there so you couldn't get away."

"And a nice mess you've made of things."

"Do you think so? I don't know."

She ignored me entirely while she fussed with the stove.

After a while there was breakfast—coffee and flapjacks. Then she brought hot water and clean bandages. She wasn't a bad first aid.

She disappeared for a time, and when she came back, she carried two forked and lopped branches.

"You can use these for emergency crutches. I want you to see some things."

"Walking wasn't easy, but I managed to follow her."

The ground was strewn with rocks that had bounded from the roof. The girl dropped to her knees a few yards from the cabin and examined the ground feverishly.

Without looking up, she motioned to me.

"There," she said pointing. "That's not imagination."

Fresh tracks showed in the soft earth.

I leaned over to examine them closely,

and my bewilderment grew. Was there an animal in these woods that I didn't know? I couldn't place those tracks.

I turned to the girl. "What are they?"

"Last night's visitors."

"Yes, but what?"

For answer she spread her hand over one. The hand did not fit, and the track was huge in comparison, but the resemblance was there.

"They're always like that," she answered briefly. "They say down below that there are savage monsters up here. Monsters that can run on the ground or leap forty or fifty feet through the air from tree top to tree top."

"That's ridiculous," I told her, nettled.

"Yes, and so are those rocks."

I was silenced. The whole thing was weird. I almost expected to come out of some bad dream.

"The Indians won't come up here. They say the place belongs to the devil," she added.

"He's welcome to it. I don't want it," I told her peevishly.

She threw back her head. "This place is *mine*, and I'm staying."

"All right. Have it your way. I'm not."

A slow smile spread over her face. "Oh, aren't you?"

She swung on her heel and left me.

How I hated that girl and her knowing smile! There was something uncanny about the whole place. Monsters and devils! What was needed was a sheriff to put a stop to the whole crazy business, especially her shooting proclivities. I was fed up on sleuthing.

I turned to the faint trail and thumped along a few halting steps. Then I realized the utter impossibility of covering all those miles of rough mountain going. Whatever her motive, that girl had fixed me so I couldn't get away alone. The whole proposition seemed to pivot on the girl. Well—more ways than one of handling a woman.

I clumped back to the cabin. The lady was cleaning her rifle.

I sat down on the makeshift stool opposite her.

"By the way," I began, "I wish

you'd trot down to the crossroads, and send somebody to help me out."

"This place hasn't a very healthy reputation," she answered briefly.

"I came up."

"Yes, about as easily as a rat forces its way into a baited trap."

"So," I said slowly. "So that's the way the land lies, is it?"

She sighted along her rifle carefully, then laid it down and leaned forward.

"You may's well know first as last. I've got to stay here to prove up on this claim, and I'm not going to stay alone. I can't hire anybody to face the nights and Things, but I've faced them too long to give up now. I've taken the law into my own hands, seized the opportunity."

"You don't mean you're going to keep me up here?"

"Just that."

I looked at the girl in frank astonishment. She was a poor liar. Whatever her real reason for holding me, and in spite of her genuine fear of the night, she was keeping something back—and making a bad stab at lying. If she couldn't lie any better than that, was she as hard-boiled as her actions indicated?

There was courage in her face, and decision—but not boldness. All along her manner had been that of one man to another; and all along I'd accepted it on that footing. To be candid, I hadn't thought of it any other way. I looked at her again, and thought I saw a way to make her change her mind.

I grinned and took a step toward her.

She sensed the change and sprang to her feet uncertainly.

My arms caught her. I kissed her deliberately and cold-bloodedly, with a vengeful memory of her pot-shot at me.

When she pulled free, I threw back my head and laughed. It took real acting to do that, for somehow I didn't feel like it at all.

She didn't give me much time to think about how I felt. Her eyes were blazing. One hand rubbed at her mouth, the other grabbed a heavy riding crop from the wall. In a split second, she'd lashed me across the temple with the weighted butt. . . .

The next thing I knew, she was just

standing there watching me. All her fire was gone. She looked tired. She stooped down, picked up her rifle, and slung it across her arm. Her voice was flat.

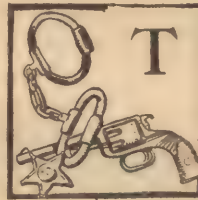
"I'm going down to get somebody to take you out of here. I may have trouble—everybody at the crossroads is afraid of this place—but I'll get back."

Now that my plan had worked, and she was ready to get me down, I wasn't so sure that I wanted to go after all.

"You needn't be in such a hurry," I told her. "I thought you wanted me here."

"I've changed my mind now. I was just a plain fool, that's all."

Before I could stop her, she had swung down the trail.



HE time dragged wearily. My leg bothered me. The bullet had made a clean hole, entered in front, passed through the flesh, and come out behind.

It was a perfect shot if it was merely meant to keep me there as the girl insisted. But what I couldn't believe was that any woman could be certain enough of her own marksmanship to put it through like that. What was the meaning of the whole thing anyway?

I poked about the place trying to get some sort of line on it, explain a few of its mysteries. There didn't seem to be anything hidden about it. Just a rude cabin set in the wilderness of the Upper Basin, a small spring, a few slashings—and, in broad daylight, several hundred scattered rocks about the size of my fist, and the tracks in the soft earth, to make a man feel that the night before had been reality.

I dragged myself along the trail to where the precipice broke sheer nearly a thousand feet to the valley below. A silver ribbon of river threaded its way there. Through the haze of distance I could make out what seemed to be a small wheat field, and a truck garden surrounding a house and huge barn.

On beyond were high mountains with snow showing. The trail up to the cabin

did not approach the valley at all, but swung off to the other side of the hog back and came down with a whole mountain in between. It was a queer place for a wheat field. I watched lazily.

Out of the quiet came the unmistakable whir of motors. I raised on my arm in startled amazement.

The sound grew, and a second later I found the soaring plane very high in the clear sky.

The distance was great, the haze maddening—but I would have banked a lot that it was a Fokker and that it landed in that field, though it was hidden from me behind a jutting stretch of forest beyond the barn.

What was that plane doing in these mountains? It was completely off the north-south aerial highways that have their daily mail and passenger services running all up and down the Coast from San Diego to Victoria and Vancouver. The eastbound aerial lines across the Cascade Mountains considerably farther south. Any plane getting off the course here would be keeping high to avoid the tricky air currents of the jagged snow crowned peaks to the east, unless——

Right then I realized that the old jinx was dogging my vacation as usual. If this wasn't work for the Immigration office, it was work for Canby and it was up to me to see the thing through.

Could it be possible that they were bringing rum in by plane from British Columbia and landing it in the valley below?

Canby had been certain there was a big leak coming somewhere—that was not arriving by the usual speedboat route. Perhaps it was a tip about this, that had made him so excited. In my department, too, we'd realized for a long time that there was a steady stream of forbidden aliens coming in.

Flying had given both our departments a lot of trouble; but a plane has to have some place to land, and this country is naturally mighty poor landing. We could keep a fair check on possible fields, though hydroplanes made us lose a lot of sleep. There are fewer

of them in legitimate commercial use though, so it's easier to follow them up.

The more I thought about it, the more convinced I became that the valley below would prove mighty interesting to Canby or me. The girl's words came back to me, about climbing up here as easily as a rat forces its way into a baited trap. That meant the going down would be otherwise.

The simplicity of the whole thing flashed over me. Of course! Why hadn't I seen it before? The cabin was a perfect lookout point, covering as it did the whole valley of the wheat and, on the other side, the trail that led down to the highway back to the Coast cities. The girl was, without doubt, their lookout. Doubtless she was down there now making plans for my disposal! My heart missed a couple of beats.

I scanned the precipice carefully but could see no way into the valley from this side. I damned the stiffness in my leg. This was a place for two men and ropes, not for one cripple.

I clumped back toward the cabin.

So weird had the whole affair been, it didn't seem queer to come face to face with a stalwart young mountaineer marching up the trail, bareheaded, his hands raised, and the muzzle of the girl's gun resting between his shoulder blades.

Her mouth was set, and her eyes defiant. That woman fondled a gun with the careless ease that most women fondle a baby.

She flung her words at me in passing.

"There's no use trying to get down tonight. We'll be all set for a start in the morning."

Her prisoner started uneasily.

"Not all night in this hellish place!" he groaned.

The girl spoke sharply: "You've got us to protect you."

She seemed about as indifferent to his agony as she'd been to mine the day before.

"You may as well sit down and eat, Lem," she said to him. "You aren't in for any more than either of us. Just remember, if you try to bolt, my aim's

good and I'll drop you. I'll leave you out in front—alone—all night."

He looked at her in a stricken way.

"What's the idea of the prisoner?"

I asked, in a low tone.

"It's the only way to make anybody come up here any more."

"Why?"

"They're scared looney of the place. The weird animals, the unearthly noises, the queer happenings."

"But you came?"

"I had to. This is too good a claim to let slip. Things didn't used to be this way up here. It's only been the last few months—since I came back from the time I was allowed last winter. If I stick it out, I can prove up on it in two weeks."

That girl didn't bat an eye. I told myself a rifle wasn't the only thing she could shoot straight.

"Yes?" I grinned at her.

"The claim's here. It's stationary. It can't run away. Those *Things* have something back of them that's going to the penitentiary or the morgue, someday. My title can rest. I've been through too much to let go now—at least, I thought so until today."

"And today?"

"Today looks like the beginning of the end. I can't keep you here. I don't know if I can stick the nights out alone—silly."

That field and the big Fokker flashed before me. The girl was plausible, smooth.

I tried to take the measure of Lem in a veiled glance. He acted like a fool; but I certainly wasn't a whit more anxious to get out of the place than he seemed.

The girl held the gun, and I knew bitterly how easy she let her finger slip on the trigger. Between us we should be a match for her. She couldn't hold that gun forever.

With this thought in mind, I stepped closer to her, and leaned forward.

"Wouldn't you get along with me up here?" I asked softly.

Until this moment she had been straight efficiency. For the first time I saw what the beauty of her softened face could be. It made me forget every-

thing else for a moment. I caught myself wondering how any man had been able to mix her up in a rotten thing like this.

Then she was speaking quietly.

"I trekked the steep trail to the cross-roads and forced Lem up here to undo my folly."

"Perhaps I don't want the folly undone now."

"I've tackled a bigger job than I can handle," she said steadily.

"I'm not so sure that I have," I smiled back.

There was a rustle of underbrush, the crackle of snapping twigs, and the distant flash of Lem's shirt.

Lem had gone—but without me. Instead of making the girl put down her rifle, my wiliness had given Lem a chance to make a break—and left me there.

She raised her rifle half to her shoulder, then dropped it. Her face set. Her chin came up.

"I'm going to see the thing through to the end!" Her voice was hard again.

"What thing?" I asked sharply.

But she was not to be taken off guard. Once again she was dominant, efficient, keenly watchful.

"We'd better get some supper and fix things for the night before it gets dark," she told me.

Later, as we began to barricade the cabin, she asked me:

"Did you see anything interesting while I was away today?"

"Nothing," I answered. "Unless you're interested in airplanes that land in wheat fields."

She gave me a startled look, but her answer came quick enough:

"Are you?"

"They do make a man think. Farmers don't generally like their grain trampled."

She wouldn't follow any of my leads though, and we fell into silence as we prepared a counter attack upon the weird nightly visitors.

At whatever cross purposes we worked, I wanted to find out about that. I thought her fear faked, in the light of more recent discoveries; but the whole nature of the attack seemed uncanny.

Though it was difficult to find, there must be a natural explanation for the disturbances.

We didn't have long to wait. With the same shivering thud of the night before, the bombardment began.

The screeching din rose to a bedlam; yet now that I was watching for it, I thought I caught a faint familiar whir.

Inga, she'd told me her name was Inga, held the pile of boxes while I climbed up. Then she slipped away in the darkness of the cabin.

I lighted the flare, and with a quick movement, thrust it through the hole in the roof.

In the sudden silence that followed, I could hear Inga's gun scrape as she swung it in the crack of the narrowly opened door. The sharp report from it drowned out the whir of motors.

A heavy crackling through the underbrush died away into the distance, and our night turned into the quiet stillness of the deep woods.

We waited taut, nerves keyed, ears straining.

I climbed down, and made my way over to Inga.

"The performance seems over for the night," I said.

She reached toward me in her eagerness.

"I'm sure I hit something," she whispered.

We opened the door cautiously, but in the inky blackness of the heavy timber it was impossible to see anything. We only exposed ourselves to ambush.

We drew back and, ostensibly, rested at opposite ends of the cabin. In reality, we listened, and watched each other furtively.

I NOTICED that Inga had unbarred the east window. It gave us our first tinge of dawn.

We both hurried outside. Inga plunged after the tracks straight into the underbrush. I followed more cautiously.

A moment later she gave a low cry.

"Find something?" I asked as I came upon her.

She raised her head and gave me a

queer look, then swept her arm in a contemptuous gesture.

"I don't quite get your place in the farce, but there's your dog."

"Not my dog," I said shortly, "I haven't had one for a year."

I leaned over the animal. She was right. It was a dog, a big Chesapeake Bay, fierce as they are rare. He was stretched out stark on the ground.

It was the feet that riveted my attention. Boxing gloves?

I bent lower. They were not boxing gloves, but the padded hands and feet of a huge ape! Missing links! The dog was set loose long enough to make tracks, the rocks thrown from the lowly flying plane and the terrific din raised to drown out the motors. The whole countryside had been scared off the lookout point. But why was the girl mixed up in it?

I edged through the underbrush toward the precipice. I wanted to see that farm again.

A huge uprooted tree barred my way. It was a great fir, and the gigantic bole hung down the face of the precipice while the massive roots, still filled with earth, towered end up like a wall.

I crawled under and edged along to the brink. Securely hidden by the big tree and jutting rocks was a ladder, leading downward. I couldn't see the bottom of it for stunted hemlocks and firs grew clinging in crevices all along the face. Some fire department had lost a good scaling ladder!

I edged over the rim. A wire led downward, too, against the cliff face. It was dizzying there on the edge, even with the trees and the broken rock below. It stood to reason, though, that there were other rocky ledges below, other ladders, and down there, some of that crumbling rock wasn't as steep as it looked from above.

I shifted my position beyond the shelter of the tree, and shaded my eyes to look off to that wheat field below. Was it two planes winging in from the west, or only birds and a vivid imagination?

There was no doubt about it that I'd stumbled on the lookout point for some

villainy; and men who build as complicated a point as this aren't letting living stumblers get away with their knowledge. What puzzled me was why Inga's shot had hit so low.

I circled the cabin warily and stopped at the open east window.

Inga was inside. She was bending low where she had lifted a board from the flooring. She turned slightly as she bent lower; and I caught a glimpse of the telephone instrument in her hand as she put it back in its hiding place, then drew the board forward again.

Telephone connection—underground wires! That wire ran down the cliff face and would be connected to the farm below! And she had told me all that bunk—and had gone down for help!

She looked up and saw me. Her cheeks were flaming, her eyes snapping, as she strode over to the window.

"I wish I'd really shot you now!" she stormed. "I just found that—stubbed on the loose board. It's been hidden here all the time! And you let me go down that hard trail, and actually kidnap a man at gun point to help you out! And I—I was feeling sorry I'd shot you!"

I caught her by the wrist and swung her back as she turned away.

"Now look here, Inga, it's just about time this farce stopped. I've been damned sorry for you because you're a whole lot too decent for the game you're in. You've got bad playmates, and you've got enough between the ears to know it."

Before she could answer, we were both startled by the sound of firing in the valley below—that rapid *rattattat* of machine guns, faint, far away, but unmistakable in the clear air.

Inga jerked away and was out of the door, speeding toward the precipice.

I found her crouched there, her eyes staring down. The huge barn was in flames. There was firing from the house and spurts of smoke from the trees beyond.

Inga turned a white face to me.

"They've come!" she said tensely.

I had a sudden savage desire to get hold of the man who'd got her into this.

"You were expecting this, weren't you?" I asked her.

"Yes—yes, of course. It's, it's the reason I want you to get away—afterward. But I didn't know then about the hidden phone—that you could tip your crowd off, while I went for Lem—to—help you."

A sob caught in her throat. I forgot the battle below.

"Look here, Inga, I just stumbled on you. I've been trying to get away from trouble, not look for it. Besides, rum's not my line anyway."

"Oh, I know it!" she cried. "Everything's coming across—dope and Chinese and fugitives and Russians, rum too, anything with a price. But why did you have to take my poor little claim for a lookout? Can't you realize what it's all meant to me to stake this place out, to come up here all alone, and to live here to prove up on it? It took grit. Vacant claims are so terribly far from anywhere."

She spoke with a ring of sincerity.

"Is that how you got mixed up in this mess?" I asked her eagerly.

"I couldn't stand those shrieks and rocks, that animal at night. When I went down to the crossroads about it, the news spread. Some men came up here to see me. They told me I'd have to keep still about it, pretend nothing was the matter, and they'd get to the bottom of things for me if I'd hold anybody who might come up here—be absolutely certain he didn't get away again. That, that's the real reason I had to—shoot—you. I was scared. I can hit a bull's-eye, or a bird on the wing— But a —man is—different. I didn't know until I searched you later, when you were unconscious—that you didn't have a gun yourself. It made things different. I'd thought it was who got the drop first."

"Why did you have to get mixed up in this!" I groaned.

"Look!" she cried, and grasped my arm.

Down below, men from the house were running the big Fokker out into the field. A hundred yards behind them taxied a smaller biplane that I'd've

sworn was one of our scout Boeings. They both raced crazily across the rough field, veering from the straight strip of smoother ground.

The lighter plane felt the air first, took it steadily as the Fokker made her first leap. There was a *rattattat* from the biplane.

The pilot of the Fokker slumped. The big ship turned sharp. Her left wing struck—crumpled. Her nose ploughed. Flames burst from her fuselage as she somersaulted over.

Inga stifled her cry with the back of her hand. Her eyes were staring at the tragedy below, seeing not only the blazing plane but all that it implied.

With a start, she came back to our position. Her face was white as she turned it to me.

"Listen," she told me tensely. "Anything's better than for them to find you here. Everything's burned up down there. Can't, can't you start a clean page, and forget everything that isn't—straight?"

"God knows, I'd like to, Inga—but it's too late now." I pointed to the biplane that was already climbing rapidly. "They'll be over us in a minute."

"They can't land here. You can get down a little way and hide before they can go round to the crossroads and come up. Please try!" she begged.

"How about the ladders?"

"What ladders?" she asked startled.

"I found them, those over by the big tree. Clever, but they'll probably see them from the air, and come up that way."

There was genuine amazement in the look she gave me. It was borne in on me that after all there was some fabric of truth in her story. Some of these mountain claims are worth a lot of hardship, both for timber and minerals.

THE biplane was soaring back and forth above us now. It wouldn't drop very low because of the tall trees, but I knew that mend in the wing. It belonged to Canby's department. There was nothing else for it, I had to play the game.

I pulled back from the edge of the

precipice into the open. I took out my handkerchief and, before I could weaken again, waved it in a big arc to the pilot and lookout as they winged above.

Inga's lips were white as she sprang after me, seized my arm.

"What are you doing?" she cried. "Don't you see, you've made it so there's no way out?"

The lookout waved back, and the plane glided on down to the valley below. Inga choked.

Poor kid, I thought. Then suddenly a lot more thoughts came exploding through my head. I was dizzy with them. I put my arm around her shoulders.

"Inga darling, don't. I'll take the blame for everything. Don't talk to them, keep still, let me do the talking—but first come clean to me, so I'll know how to fix it."

She didn't pull away. She put her head a little closer into my shoulder.

"It's too late now. Nothing can fix it!"

Her lips stole upward, met mine. Rum runners, smugglers, airplanes, everything else in the world dropped out of existence.

Suddenly she drew away, and her lips against my ear were tense:

"The Government men're coming up the cliff—like you said."

It was Canby's voice, and for the first time in my life I disliked it—hated it. His words came gloatingly, even though his breath caught with the long climb of the ladders.

"Oh, boy, Logan's gang used that Fokker in from British Columbia; then ran their aliens on by farm truck with a camouflage load, to work on the Great Northern tunnel through the Cascade Mountains, and let 'em trickle on before their fake union cards got investigated. Slick! The Great Northern Camp was a grand place to dump a lotta their booze too."

I plunged into the undergrowth, and crawled through the big tree roots to the ladder beyond.

As Canby's head came over the top, his eye fell on me.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said as

he started toward me. "Can't you keep out of anything!"

Inga threw herself between us.

"He's my prisoner," she blazed. "I got him with my own rifle."

Canby and the two undercover men who'd followed him up the ladder looked dazed for an instant, then began to guffaw.

"It's all right, Inga," I told her. "I'm yours for keeps. Go easy on the girl, Canby, will you?"

"Huh?" Canby's eyes popped. "Go easy on *her*? Well——"

"I *told* you these men would be back!" wailed Inga. "Oh, why didn't you hide? See what you're in for now!"

I looked beyond her to those twinkling eyes and twitching faces; and I knew I was in for a lot that Inga didn't know anything about. Canby's razzing might be with a discreet tongue, but not those two deputies.

I fixed Canby with a stern eye.

"Arson, war, and what else did you make out with down below?" I asked coldly.

Canby was jubilant.

"Logan himself, the head of the biggest organized gang of smugglers the Puget Sound country ever saw. We caught him red-handed, after me trailing him for three years and never able to pin the goods on him. He turned that make-believe farm down there into his headquarters last winter while Miss Inga Barnes was away from her claim on time allowance. They've got wires of some kind up here, must have kept one of their men here, and turned this point into a lookout station to send their signals across the Border and on down to the farm below."

Great Caesar! Then Inga *had* been on the level, after all! I suddenly saw red when I realized the danger she must have walked into when she came back to her claim. That Logan hadn't put her on the spot was only because he thought his weird night scheme would

scare her so everybody else would be frightened away too, while her absolute disappearance would bring on an investigation with more people than ever poking around.

Canby was going on: "They were just one jump too foxy though—the lady had too much grit for 'em. After what she told us, we nailed one of their trucks this side of the Great Northern tunnel, piled in, and sneaked in on 'em in that, while they were busy watching Meagan and Wright coming in with our scout planes. Logan's slick, though—set fire to the place when he saw we had him. Tried to make his getaway in the Fokker—we plugged him. Got eight of his gang too, and I don't think any got away."

Inga was looking from Canby to me in wide-eyed amazement. When he stopped for breath, she turned to me.

"You—you don't belong to Logan's gang?"

Canby and his men guffawed again.

I drew myself up, and spoke to them with all the withering dignity I could muster: "There's a hidden phone under the cabin floor. It might be interesting to—er follow up the wires."

Canby walked a few feet, then turned and grinned back.

"I say, Thomas," he called. "You've got the most interesting thing right there. We came up here to investigate her story before we set the trap. It's the hot tip I've been working on when I left you to go to Bellingham. That weird night entertainment set me thinking. It sounded like Logan's tracks. If it wasn't your precious vacation, I'd tell you just how much it interested your Chief too!"

Canby was right. It was my vacation. He had a whole squad from his Department down in the valley to hold the prisoners and clean up on the evidence, besides two good men with him up here.

I turned strictly to personal matters.

A Scotland Yard

The Strange
Clue of the —

GEORGE
DOUGHERTY



*In which a N. Y.
Chief of Detectives proves he can
use psychology as
well as guns and
cuffs.*



MURDERED by mis-
take?

George S. Dougherty, Chief of New York's detectives in 1911, didn't think so.

William Jackson, pleasant, liberal man of Wall Street, had been slain in the fashionable Iriquois Hotel in West Forty-Fourth Street. Overpowered and chloroformed, he had been beaten to death with a chair in his luxurious apartment, just two doors from an identical suite of rooms occupied by District Attorney Charles S. Whitman, relentless prosecutor of criminals.

Jackson had been dead forty-eight hours. The police had only the most meager clues. The public press, convinced the dead financier was the victim of a plot aimed at the District Attorney, was becoming critical.

"Do you expect an arrest today?" the police reporters demanded, as the Chief arrived at his office the morning of the third day after the murder.

"I doubt it, boys," was Dougherty's



BROKEN MATCH



By
**JAMES K.
MARTINDALE**

reply. "Give us time. Right now I'm going over to see if Mrs. Betty Cane's dog is dead."

"Huh!" grunted one reporter to his companion. "With a swell murder to solve, the Chief is going over to see if Mrs. Whoosis' dog is dead. This ain't

Headquarters, this is the Old Ladies Home!"

Personally George Dougherty didn't give a hoot about the health of Mrs. Cane's mutt, but it just happened to be of interest in the case at hand. Mrs. Cane, if the Chief had his dope right, was the woman who two weeks before had purchased from a Newark druggist a bottle of chloroform to kill a dog. It had taken him two days to learn that the tiny bottle Mrs. Cane bought was the one that had been picked up on the bed near William Jackson's body.

Now if Mrs. Cane used the chloroform to kill the dog, how could it have been used to chloroform Jackson? Maybe she didn't use it on the dog. Then the dog should be alive. That was what the Chief was going to find out.

A SERIES of loud barks greeted his knock at the door of Mrs. Cane's rooming house in West Fiftieth Street. That settled the dog question.

Mrs. Cane, elderly, Irish and fat, let him in questioningly. She hadn't run a lodging house in Hell's Kitchen for twenty years without learning to tell a policeman by his feet. But the dog was Dougherty's immediate friend. That seemed to satisfy the woman, and she led her caller to a chair in the parlor.

"Nice dog, Mrs. Cane," the detective began, smilingly.

"Yes," was the hesitant reply. "But Spot gets nasty lots of times. I got some chloroform to kill him a couple of weeks ago, but lost heart when he turned good. Then when he started acting up again I couldn't find the chloroform."

Dougherty reached in his pocket.

"Is this it?"

"Why, bless me, yes!"

Mrs. Cane took the bottle, and examined it excitedly.

"But where did you find it?"

"On the bed where William Jackson was found dead in the Iriquois Hotel the other morning," the detective answered. "He was chloroformed, you know, then beaten to death with a chair."

"Gracious! You don't think I—Oh, my goodness!"

"No, no, Mrs. Cane," Dougherty interrupted, reassuringly. "Of course not. I wouldn't call you plump, but you are a little too stout to have climbed into the alcove kitchen of Jackson's apartment through the narrow transom that we found forced from its hinge. But if we could find who got that bottle of chloroform from you, we might learn who did kill Jackson."

"Well, now, I'll tell you," the landlady resumed, more confidently. "As near as I recollect, that bottle disappeared from the medicine closet in the hall upstairs about a week ago. You don't suppose any of my roomers could have done Mr. Jackson in, do you?"

"I haven't any idea, Mrs. Cane, but it's certain some one of them probably knows something about this bottle."

Most of the roomers worked or were on the streets all day. They usually returned separately after dark. Dougherty decided on a plan, based on psychology, his hobby. He had a couple of psychological clues in this case, a few bits of broken matches, found beneath a portiere between the kitchen alcove and the room where Jackson was found, and two worn tickets to a dance hall.

By 6 o'clock he was ready for the return of the roomers. Four uniformed detectives waited with him. One stood facing the door, revolver in hand.

A key rattled in the lock. The door swung open. A powerful, sputtering searchlight shot its blinding beams square into the face of the unsuspecting roomer. A tableau stood revealed:—

Roomer No. 1—Stocky and short, red-moustached and yellow-toothed—Mike Rafferty. Confronting him in the white light was a blue-uniformed policeman, reaching menacingly for his gun.

Rafferty's head jutted forward. He doubled his fists. His jaws clenched.

"What the hell is this!" he roared.

Dougherty emerged from behind the

concealed searchlight and questioned him.

Rafferty was a porter in a department store, he said. What was the idea, anyway? No, he'd never been in the Iriquois.

Dougherty sent him to a rear room under guard.

Lodger No. 2 arrived a few minutes later. Tableau:—A swaying, six-foot, square-faced man of 30, with a strong breath.

"Hic!" said he, "I bane good Swede. Want to fight?"

Gus Oleson, piano polisher, stuck his lower jaw out and waited for the worst.

No. 3—A small, nervous man in unpressed clothes. He was frightened, and blinked dazedly. Dougherty noted that he could have entered the Jackson transom. Mrs. Crane said he was back in his rent. He chewed at his lower lip, glanced at the policeman and half turned toward the less dazzling hallway. He was George Ashby, bookkeeper, unemployed. Had read of Jackson but never saw him. He joined the others in the guarded room.

No. 4—A tall, slender youth of 18, white teeth, brown hair, brown eyes, handsome. For an instant he seemed about to flee, then he straightened and lifted his chin. Paul Geidel, Connecticut schoolboy, looking for work. Just came from supper. He broke his toothpick and dropped the bits to the floor. Never even heard of the Iriquois, he said.

No. 5—A loudly dressed, Broadwayish man of 30. As the searchlight caught him he swung about, reached for his pocket and ducked behind the door.

When the policeman failed to shoot, he returned wearily and asked, nonchalantly, "What's up? You've got nothing on me."

The policeman took a .38-calibre revolver from the lodger's pocket. Fred Moore, slender, lithe, from Chicago.

No. 6—An almost fleshless, trembling man of 40, obviously a narcotic addict.

"Leave me alone. I'm not afraid of you. I won't talk!"

He talked, however. He was George Cruishank, a compositor. He couldn't

control a muscle and met no one's eyes.

No. 7—Lionel Saunders, actor. He stood nobly in the spotlight; didn't even seem surprised. His facial muscles did not quiver. His eyes met Dougherty's unflinchingly. He was 53. Yes, he often had been in the Iriquois. And he had an alibi for Saturday night, if all this flapdoodle was due to the Jackson murder. It was all rather amusing, even to a hungry actor.

No. 8—A dark-haired, fat, short youth. Terribly frightened, but he stood his ground. Patrick McGrance, dry goods clerk.

McGRANCE was conveyed to the guarded room with the seven other roomers, and the Chief looked around triumphantly at his aides.

"Has all this—er, flapdoodle—proved anything to you gentlemen?" he asked slyly. "Who's your candidate?"

"Number 8," said Mrs. Cane, "although I'd never have believed it."

"He's short and fat. He couldn't have gotten through the transom."

"The guy with the gun," hazarded one of the detectives.

"Not guilty. Why didn't he use it on Jackson instead of the chloroform and a chair?"

"The old actor?"

Dougherty sighed. He took some matches from his pocket and laid them on the table.

"Bring Number 4 back here," he directed.

Paul Geidel came into the room apprehensively, and sat down at a chair across the table from Dougherty. His eyes were averted.

"Well," the Chief asked, "what have you to say?"

"Nothing," Geidel replied.

He drew a cigarette from his pocket, picked up a match from the table and started to strike it. His eye was caught by a revolver which Dougherty shoved slightly across the table. The unlighted match snapped in the youth's fingers and fell unnoticed to the floor.

Dougherty reached deliberately to the floor, picked up the two pieces of the match and laid them in front of him on



PAUL GEIDEL, SNAPPED IN THE COURTROOM JUST BEFORE HIS SENTENCE—LIFE!

the table. He pulled from his pocket the bits of broken matches from Jackson's apartment, and laid them alongside the ones picked up from the floor.

"What did you need the money for, Paul?" the Chief asked softly.

Geidel drew a deep breath. He faced the smiling detective.

"Clothes, Chief—and then I had a girl who danced——"

"At the Blue Gardens," interrupted Daugherty, drawing from his pocket the worn dance tickets, his other psychological clue.

"I didn't mean to kill him," Geidel chattered nervously. "I only meant to put him to sleep. I guess because I had to wait so long for him to come in I got nervous, and when the chloroform didn't take effect right off, I hit him too hard."

"Matches always were dangerous, my boy," concluded the Chief. "Let's get going."

The searchlight was packed up. The Chief and his men returned to Headquarters. With them went Geidel on his way to Sing Sing for life.

MONKEY MAN



New York ★ ★ —

Fog, hooch, and the spark of gay adventure combined to plunge Scrap Eagan in a web of crime . . . Told by a fellow clubman.



SCRAP EAGAN heard the swift pad of running feet, a pause, and another sprint.

Hestopped, listening while strange figures formed in his brain.

He couldn't think . . . that stuff at the club was bad—he wouldn't drink any more of it. And now some one was following him. Absurd . . . no one would follow him.

He looked around. The night was soft, silent, cool; a half-transparent fog blanketed the world and gave the street lamps a ghostly appeal.

Scrap turned from the sidewalk and waited in the dark shelter of the portecochere. He could stay here and let the runner go on by.

A figure stopped opposite the point where he stood in the gloom—stopped and turned toward him—a vague figure that had taken on suddenly the post of skulker. Bent over as if fearful of detection the newcomer approached on tip-toe and stood, half crouched, less than six feet from where Eagan was hiding.

Scrap could hear his heavy breathing as though the runner had come far or was unused to violent exercise. He started to make his presence known but changed

his mind for no good reason that he could have offered.

Heavy footsteps sounded—measured, mechanical.

The skulker swore softly as the broad figure of a policeman went past, a vague half-formed bulk that appeared, moved slowly, and disappeared again.

"Maybe that cop's not a friend of yours—eh?" Scrap wanted to know.

He heard the man gasp, saw him jerk around spasmodically, straighten up and raise his right arm. Eagan saw a pistol in that extended hand.

"Put 'em up," rasped a voice, "and be damn quick——"

But Scrap Eagan, who couldn't seem to manage the post-prohibition poison passed around at the club, had a gift for slinging fists that was little short of genius. And he was just sufficiently drunk to be reckless. In an instant he gave that genius free rein. A rabbit punch that barely reached the hold-up man's chin brought another gasp and another oath.

The pistol swung in a swift lateral arc.

Eagan wondered why the skulker hadn't tried to shoot him. He took the blow on his left shoulder and smashed through with a straight right. He chuckled when that pile-driver punch landed. Just drunk enough to be enjoying himself. Action—that was what he needed to clear his head.

The armed man, under the force of Eagan's poke, went back against a rock pillar of the porte-cochere and bounced forward again, his flailing arms busy.

Scrap noticed that he was tall, with a fine pair of shoulders, that he was alert and fast on his feet, a worthy opponent. He met the rush with a left jab that must have landed low, for it brought forth a surprised "woof." He dodged the swing of the clubbed gun and started a right hook from his knee.

He had seen Sam Langford use that smash a dozen times, and it had carried the kayo sign nearly every time.

His fist found a soft place under the stick-up gentleman's left ear, lifted him sideways off his feet and laid him out, straight and limp and still, on the graveled roadway of the porte-cochere.

Scrap bent down and turned the prone figure over on its back.

"Out for a million," he said, laughing to himself, "I wonder what it's all about. Wish I hadn't taken that last snifter . . . Wish I could think a little straighter. A man with a gun and unlawful habits and inclinations dodging from a cop. Humph."

Another figure came out of the fog, stopped, hesitant, waiting. A low whistle—the first three notes of the scale—a pause, a repetition.

Scrap Eagan, hiding behind a pillar, answered the whistled signal. He smiled. He had nothing to lose—and it was fine fun.

"Okay, Jerry," said the whistler, "watch for the bull. I'm goin' up the outside."

Eagan saw the broad figure move past the porte-cochere, grasp the grilling over a window and go up. Scrap could see his feet swinging free an instant, then they disappeared.

"Jerry," he whispered, "anyhow my name's Jerry. What else am I, do I help rob old Vandermere and his dowager? I do . . . A sweet tale for those chair-coasters at the club."

The prostrate man wore a heavy, dark, overhang cap. Scrap took it off and placed it on his own head, casting his topper to the roadway. He also relieved Jerry of his checked short-length mackintosh. He put that on also. He picked up a pistol which had fallen from the unconscious man's nerveless fingers and slipped it into his pocket.

He stood under the grilled window, waiting for the man whose confederate he had become. The house was dark, no lights showed at any window he could see.

The policeman came back, walking slowly, like a Percheron on parade. From his line of march along the rim of the sidewalk the officer could not possibly have seen the figure of Scrap Eagan flattened against the wall. Even the darkened windows were hardly visible in the gloom. He went on, missing a rich catch and a possible promotion.

Scrap laughed. "This hold-up busi-

ness is a cinch . . . what's the use of working?"

FOR five minutes he waited, motionless under the window. Each minute seemed to be a hundred times longer than its predecessor.

The silence grew oppressive, ominous. He began to wonder if the burglar had fallen dead or had been caught, and if people were stalking *him*, the burglar's confederate.

He grew anxious, fearful. He began to shake in a veritable palsy of terror. He wished he had another drink to stiffen him up. He didn't dare run away because he didn't want to leave the house and its treasures to the mercy of the burglar who had gone so easily into an upper window.

He wondered if he ought to call a cop, and he decided not to do so. They might get away before the snail-footed limbs of the law arrived. Besides, he might have trouble explaining why he hadn't called him sooner. He regretted that wild party at the club . . . he couldn't seem to think, or to plan.

He heard Jerry moving, heard muffled, labored swearing. Jerry was waking up. Scrap wondered whether he should go over and knock him out again. He considered it fully in a half-alcoholic daze and gave it up as cowardly. He drew out the pistol again. The possession of the gun gave him confidence. Jerry was helpless, Jerry couldn't do anything to him.

A scream cut the night—shrill, clear—a crescendo scream that lifted the hair on Eagan's head.

"The dowager," he gasped—"bet he's killing her."

The window went up—went up with a sharp crack like a pistol shot—the window right above him, two flights up. He saw very vaguely the heavy shoulders of his confederate.

Another whistled scale—short, sharp.

Scrap answered it.

"Catch it, Jerry!"

A satchel hit him on the left shoulder, twisted him half around and nearly threw him off balance.

Scrap shifted the gun from his left

hand and grabbed up the satchel from the grass, holding it tightly by the curved leather handle while the house-breaker came down the side of the building like a huge malformed monkey.

Another figure showed for an instant at the window, a figure that let out a prolonged scream. Eagan knew from the volume of that yell that the dowager had not been injured.

"Beat it, Jerry!" said the whistler as he dropped to the lawn beside him.

Scrap turned into the curved roadway of the porte-cochere and met the weaving, staggering Jerry, who made a pass at him, missed, and measured his length on the gravel.

"Dippy," Jerry rasped, "it ain't me, Dippy—it ain't me!"

"Gawd," said Dippy, lunging forward—"a damn flatfoot!"

Scrap Eagan felt clutching fingers on his shoulder, heavy, gripping fingers he couldn't shake off. He dropped to his hands and knees—dropped with startling suddenness—and Dippy, like a falling house, went over him.

Mrs. Vandermere was still stabbing the quiet night with her penetrating shrieks.

Scrap came to his feet, but Dippy was up also, with a gun in his hand. Eagan swung the satchel as the pistol exploded in his face. He imagined he felt the wind of the bullet. The satchel was heavy, a good club. A hoarse gasp came from Dippy as the bag landed and swept the burglar aside.

Scrap heard a whistle, shrill summons of the law. Another whistle from another direction. For an instant he stood, undecided. He had a quantity of stolen jewelry in his hand—and officers of the law were coming. Dippy and Jerry would probably be on their way. Think—he couldn't think . . . terror took hold of him, a wild desire to escape.

He threw the gun away and put his feet to work. He caught the sound of heavy footsteps. The cops! He crossed the street, running on his toes, went down an alley, crossed another street and ran for two minutes.

He cast Jerry's cap at a lamp post and slipped out of the tell-tale mackintosh.

A cab approached out of the gloom, slowed down invitingly. Scrap got in and gave his address.

Free—he was free at last. He took a few long breaths and sank into the so-called cushions.

"Have I had a dream," he said, "has all the bug-juice gone to my head, or is the city of New York mad tonight?"



HE WENT through the ornate lobby of his apartment house, deserted now save for a fair girl at the switch-board.

Scrap smiled at her.

"Why, Mister Eagan," she trilled, "where's your hat?"

"I left it at the service station to be Simonized."

"Oh, Mister Eagan—you're so droll . . . what an awful looking bag!"

"You'd be surprised," said Scrap, making for the lift.

The dusky operator showed white teeth in a grin.

"Dat Vendome sho' is a poker-playin' place—when you gotta bring it home in a bag!"

"You'd be surprised too, Curly," said Scrap, leaving the lift at his floor.

Without recourse to a key he pushed opened the door of his apartment, for it was rarely locked. Besides, he knew Motohiko, the Jap, would be waiting for him.

"A cup of coffee, Moti—big and black. I've got a head that should be cleared."

"Yes, Meest Eagan," said Moti, disappearing through the portieres.

Scrap slipped out of his dinner clothes and got into slippers, sky-blue pajamas, and a lounging robe that looked like it had been cut from an ambitious awning. He drank the coffee slowly, with the compelled respect one offers to medicine. He shook his head when Motohiko reached for the disreputable satchel lying at hand on the table.

"I'll attend to the bag, Moti. . . . That'll be all for you tonight."

"Yes, Meest Eagan."

Finishing his coffee at last, Scrap Eagan opened the bag and poured a

treasure flood out upon the polished surface of the table. He stared in wonderment at the gorgeous display.

"A fortune!" he gasped. "Those two night-hawks were all ready to fly away with a fortune!"

He rubbed his eyes, he ran his hands through thick brown hair, he wiped his face with a white handkerchief taken from the pocket of his lounging robe, he picked up a few of the gleaming pieces and put them down again.

"A fortune—just like that—a whole jewelry store! And people work for a living. Life's funny." He laughed shortly, reaching for the telephone. The black coffee had fulfilled its duty.

"Yes, Mister Eagan," said the voice of the fair girl.

"Give me the nearest police station, please."

He heard her gasp

"My gracious! Is—is anything wrong?"

He laughed again.

"Not a thing. On the contrary everything is exactly right. You just listen in, my dear, and you'll get such a tha-r-rill!"

"Thank you . . . I will."

A heavy voice—hurried, impatient—as though the owner of it never quite caught up:

"Hello."

"Is this the police station?"

"Sure."

Scrap Eagan took a long breath.

"Mister Vandemere's residence," he announced slowly, "has been robbed."

"Oh—yeah?" Noncommittal, officious, almost challenging. . . . He knew he'd get nothing from that voice.

"Indeed," said Scrap, "I assure you."

The heavy voice was almost accusing.

"Who is this speaking?"

Scrap grinned. "This is the shade of Sherlock Holmes."

"Humph!" A long pause. "Wait a minute, will you? I'm not up on shades. I'll connect you with headquarters. Maybe they understand the spirit language. Will you hold it?"

The voice seemed a bit anxious.

"Of course," Scrap promised.

He held it, held it for half a minute, for three quarters.

"No wonder," he complained, half to himself and half to the silent phone, "no wonder the burglar has such an easy time if the cops take so long . . . Yes?"

"All right," said a voice, a restrained, well-modulated voice, a voice—so Scrap reasoned—of authority. "All right—shoot the piece."

"I've been trying to inform the authorities," Eagan began, "that the residence of Mister Morris Vandermere has been robbed."

"The authorities know it, sir. What else can you tell us?"

"I can tell you who did it."

"Good; that's what we want to know."

"A man called Dippy."

"Humph."

"Yes . . . a broad, heavy-set fellow who can climb up the side of a house like a monkey."

"Who else?"

"Jerry—I don't know his real name. Tall, square-shouldered; he ought to have a stiff neck by now. I suppose the police know all those nicknamed gentlemen."

"Thank you. We know them—Dippy Connor and Jerry Mears. One of them shot Officer Carrigan, who didn't recognize them . . . shot him in the shoulder. They got away, with the swag."

"Not with the swag," Scrap corrected. "I've got that."

"What?"

"Not so boisterous. . . . You're hard on my ear drums, you should exercise more control."

"All right, Mister Eagan," said the voice, under control.

"What," Scrap yelled—"you know me?"

"Of course," replied the man at headquarters, chuckling. "We back-tracked the call while you were waiting. Mister Scrap Eagan of the bond house of Eagan and Sanderson, and a right good amateur middle-weight. I've seen you flatten a palooka or two."

"Not so dumb—those cops," Scrap thought. He laughed. "I've got the jewelry up here in my apartment all

spread out on a table. It's a fine sight . . . you should see it."

He heard a gasp, or an oath, he couldn't tell which, then a poor imitation of a laugh.

"You're not drunk, are you, Mister Eagan, you haven't been filling in some party at the club, have you?"

"There was a little party at the club," Scrap admitted, "and I've been a couple of sheets in the wind, but I'm cold sober now, and I've got a fortune in jewels on the table in front of me. Listen." He looked over the collection of jewelry. "There is a dog-collar that is heavy with diamonds, there's half a dozen bracelets, there are five rings, with stones as big as a Kelly pool number, there's a gem-encrusted pin wide enough and long enough to cover that fat old dowager's front, there are two small strings of pearls and two large ones—magnificent things. As they are exactly alike I imagine one string of each is paste. There's silver, and——"

"What the hell!" said the voice, rich is blasphemy and weak in volume. "What the seven colors——!"

"Yeah. Come on up, or send two good men."

"But how in the blazing pits of inferno did you get 'em, where did—did—?" The voice faltered, stuttered, fizzled out.

"I'm spifflicated," Scrap explained, "and somebody's after me—see? The fog doesn't look so good. I duck under old Vandermere's porte-cochere. Dippy drops a satchel on my head, the old lady does some high notes and the cops whistle. I'm not just right in the head yet. I grab the swag and beat it away from there."

Another pause while Scrap sat and looked at the mute phone.

"You're right sure," said the voice, still somewhat in doubt, "that this is not a joke, that——?"

"Absolutely . . . hurry up. I'll be waiting for you."

"Okay, Mister Eagan . . . and thanks."

IT SEEMED to Scrap Eagan that not more than two minutes had elapsed when he heard the soft whisper

of the elevator. It stopped at his floor. He couldn't hear the sound of approaching footsteps, but he knew they had come, for the knocker of his door sounded cautiously.

"Come in," he cried.

The door was thrust open suddenly, and two menacing figures pushed in.

Scrap Eagan sat, staring in astonishment, then he came to his feet as though his chair had become a volcano. He stood poised, hands on the table, thinking, thinking—searching for an opening. He knew he was helpless, his efficient fists could not handle such a situation as this.

"Jerry Mears," he said, "and the monkey man, Dippy Connor. Seems only a little while ago since I saw you two."

Jerry caressed a neck still sore from Eagan's potent right.

"Yeah," he said without enthusiasm.

Dippy glanced at the treasure-laden table.

"He ain't a flat-foot, Jerry," he observed, in a voice that sounded rusty, as though from disuse, "he's a gentleman crook. Look at all that stuff."

"You sound better, my friend Dippy," Scrap said smiling, "when you whistle."

"Aw—" said Dippy. "T'ell with you!"

"You seem to have found me very quickly, gentlemen. How, may I ask?"

"No careful gent puts his moniker in his hat. That topper——"

"Oh sure," said Scrap, "an oversight. But pride——"

"Aw—hell!" Dippy growled. "Can that applesauce. Git busy."

"What'll I do, Mister Dippy? Shadow-box, walk on my hands, whistle——?"

"Put that stuff back in the bag—and git a move on. My finger's nervous."

"We strive to please," Eagan began, lifting the disreputable satchel in one hand and the dog-collar in the other. "This'll look well on some dame——"

"Hurry," Jerry warned, "before I plug you."

"And this gorgeous string of pearls," Scrap continued, "is worthy of ——"

Dippy's pistol pointed and his cold gray eyes held a steely glint.

"One more crack outa you—and out goes your light. I don't like a smart guy anyhow."

With no more conversation Scrap Eagan picked up the pieces of jewelry and silver, one by one, and deposited them in the bag. He replaced the bag on the table and snapped it shut.

"What else?" he asked.

"Throw it over here," Jerry ordered, "and throw it easy." Evidently he didn't care to get in reach of Eagan's fists again.

Scrap heard the gentle whisper of the lift, caught the stoppage of that soft purring, and he supposed the headquarters men were on the way. He waited ten precious, potent seconds, and swung his right arm.

"Here it comes," he cried gaily, and loud enough for any one in the hall to hear him.

But he hadn't thrown it easy. In fact he gave his arm a quick snap and sent the satchel spinning.

It struck Dippy amidships and folded the bandit up. Connor voiced a tremendous howl and lunged forward, gun flaming. Futile bullets were driven into the floor.

The door crashed open as Dippy found his feet. The bandits whirled to face it.

Scrap Eagan measured his length on the floor, out of the path of bullets.

For five seconds the apartment was filled with thunder.

Dippy Connor howled again—a rasping agonized shriek.

Jerry yelled, "I'm in—I'm done!"


The firing ceased. Scrap got up and stood by the table. Jerry Mears was in a corner, empty hands shoulder high.

The broad figure of Dippy lay, face up between the table and the door. He lay grotesquely flat and horribly still, and Scrap Eagan knew that Dippy the climber would climb no more.

"Okay, Mister Eagan?" asked one of a pair of square-jawed men who stood in the doorway, guns still in hand.

"Yes," said Scrap, "except that you have made a sorry mess of a fine apartment."

"I reckon old Vandermere will be glad to pay the tick—huh?"



The LABORATORY

YOU contest fiends have a treat in store for you. For three months, beginning with the MAY issue, SCOTLAND YARD will introduce a novel form of competition—brand new to any magazine in this field.

The covers of the MAY, JUNE, and JULY issues will picture the action-climax of a dramatic situation. The Inspector offers \$500 in gold for the best letters describing the conditions which led up to and caused each one.

A man, for instance, enters a room, and sees a woman phoning. He slides up unnoticed, reaches over, snatches the receiver from her hand and clamps it to his own ear. That is the situation in which the MAY cover of SCOTLAND YARD portrays him. . . . All you have to do is tell us who this man is, what impelled his action, and whom he's listening to. That's simple, isn't it? Yet it may help you win a pocketful of gold. . . .

Some of you—we hope—have noticed that the BAFFLEGRAM scheduled for this month, "Lost in Paris," was actually lost somewhere between the printer and the magazine. . . . Seriously, though, we left it out advisedly. The contest hasn't aroused the enthusiasm we hoped for it, and so, unless at least five hundred of you write squawks during the next fortnight, the BAFFLEGRAM will probably stay lost—for keeps.

AND now for the prize winners of the December Bafflegram Contest—*The Torturers*. The replies to this contest were exceptionally well worked out. In many of the answers *all* of the clues were used and carefully woven together

into a logical story synopsis. Some of you, however, decided that Professor Lockhart and his wife and child had nothing to do with the rest of the plot, so did not mention that angle in your replies. Quite a few of the solutions showed excellent imagination which might be put to work in story writing.

After much turmoil the judges awarded the prizes as follows:

FIRST PRIZE: *Lemuel F. Young, of Castile, New York.*

The original oil painting for the cover of the November Scotland Yard.

SECOND PRIZE: *Elsie Yendricks, 2008 Davidson Ave., New York.*

A five dollar gold piece and a full year's subscription to Scotland Yard.

THIRD PRIZE: *William A. Winter, 809 N. McBride Street, Syracuse, New York.*

A full year's subscription to Scotland Yard.

HONORABLE MENTION is given to *Everette Payette, Jr., of Wyandotte, Michigan; Frank Michaelis of Brooklyn, N. Y.; and Henry Ball of Chicago, Ill.*

HERE is the solution submitted by the first-prize winner—Lemuel Young of Castile.

Because of jealous hatred, Dr. Stillson kidnapped Professor Lockhart's wife and baby. The doctor was experimenting on the human brain, and he used these two in his work. The baby died, and the woman became insane. She escaped from the doctor, was found in another town and put in an asylum.

Dr. Stillson then kidnapped his own daughter, the child of Madame Adele, and used her in his experiments. He also used his half-witted assistant in experimental work.

During a brief period of sanity the assistant tried to prevent the doctor from experimenting on the child. In the struggle some bottles of chemicals were upset, causing an explosion and fire. Before the half-wit realized it he had strangled the doctor. Being terror stricken he did not dare leave the building, for a crowd had collected outside.

The crazed assistant cowered in a corner, screening the child from the flames with his own body. He was dying from a knife wound made by the doctor during the struggle. When the fireman took the little girl the half-wit warned him to beware of the Black Raven—partly to cover up his own guilt and partly the ravings of a diseased mind.

ACCORDING to Elsie Yendricks, the runner-up, the solution is this:

Dr. Stillson was the child's father, as was proven by Madame Adele's housekeeper's supposition that its paternal parent's initials were R. S. He had kidnapped the child because of this proprietorship and because he had held a personal grudge against its mother.

Having instilled nothing but fear in the child, because of his lack of love for her and his strange surroundings, he had soon tired of her perpetual crying and changed his tactics to those of doping and beating.

The helpless child had appealed to the half-witted's simple soul and he had saved her from tortures in worse forms more than once.

The night of the strange happenings, Doctor Stillson had finally made an important discovery in his field of chemical research. Seeking a victim on whom he could test his discovery, he immediately thought of the child and determined to use her.

He brought her into the laboratory and called upon his assistant for his services. The sight of the child in this predicament and hearing her scream thrice at the doctor's hands, caused something to snap in the assistant's brain and he had attacked the doctor and throttled him.

As he loosened his hold on the doctor, Stillson fell, upsetting a table which had held vials of chemicals, with a loud crash. The chemical substances were combustible and caused the explosion and the ensuing fire.

The assistant snatched the child and retreated to a corner with the purpose of protecting her from the enveloping flames—the only clear thought in his brain. When he handed the child to the rescuer, Hal Rogers, the words he had croaked had no portent—but were merely the ravings of a now-thoroughly depraved mind.

THE third-prize winner, William Winter, solves the mystery in the following fashion:

The child was Madame Adele's daughter. This is proven by the housekeeper's description of the child. The doctor was its father. This is proven by the housekeeper's recollection, although uncertain, that the father's initials were R. S.—letters corresponding with Dr. Stillson's name. Another fact showing that the doctor was the father is that he had been living in the cottage for five years and this is approximately the child's age. This shows that the doctor had left his wife before the child was born. And this would account for the housekeeper, who had been engaged by Madame Adele after the child was born, not knowing anything of the father.

When the child disappeared it was taken away by the mad doctor. That he was mad was proven by his abuse of the child—as no sane person would horribly mistreat a five-year-old child.

When the housekeeper, upon the child's disappearance, suggested that Madame Adele go to the police or take some action, she refused and became hysterical because she knew and feared her mad husband. Later, to ease her conscience, she drank heavily—a means of escape which ended in her death. Madame Adele feared her husband more than she cared for her child and that is why she remained silent.

The doctor kept the child's presence a secret from the neighbors or any chance passer-by. He did this because he knew that if the true conditions were found out he would go to jail. The doctor had, for some insane reason known only to his mad brain, been doping and abusing the child horribly for weeks. The half-wit's affection for the innocent child made him hate the doctor for his treatment of her.

On the night of the fire, the doctor had been especially venomous toward the little girl, and she had screamed out in terror and pain three times. Then the half-wit hurled himself at the fiend and started to strangle him.

There was a furious struggle in which the doctor endeavored to escape the grip on his throat. In the struggle the men upset some chemical receptacles which exploded and set the house on fire.

By the time the half-wit realized that the doctor was dead, the cottage had become a blazing inferno. The man, seeing he could not escape the flames, gathered the child in his arms and slunk into a corner away from the flames—protecting the child as much as possible.

It was this way that the heroic fireman, Hal Rogers, found them after battling his way through smoke and flame to get into the room. The half-wit's look of fierce, tense emotion was joy—joy at having killed the man he hated and saved the child he loved.

When the half-wit thrust the child at the fireman telling him to save her he warned the fireman to look out for a Black Raven. He said the Raven had killed the doctor and would kill him, too. This statement was merely the ravings of his crazed mind—perhaps to turn aside suspicion from the justifiable crime he had committed.

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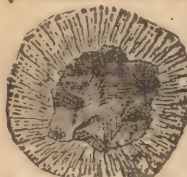
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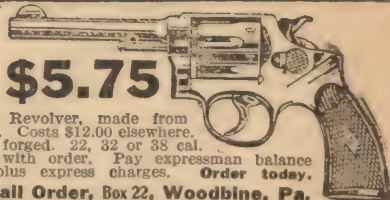
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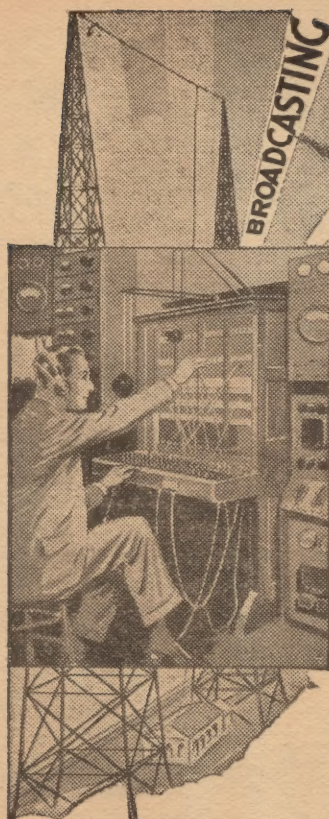
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WIRELESS OPERATING

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Don't spend your life slaving away in some dull, hopeless job! Don't be satisfied to work for a mere \$20 or \$30 a week. Let me show you how to make **REAL MONEY in RADIO—THE FASTEST-GROWING, BIGGEST MONEY-MAKING GAME ON EARTH.**

JOBS LEADING TO SALARIES OF \$60, \$70 A WEEK AND UP!

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You learn ALL branches of Radio at Coyne—in 10 short, pleasant weeks—**NOT BY CORRESPONDENCE**, but by actual work on actual Radio, Television and Sound equipment. We don't waste time on useless theory. We give you just the practical training you need—in 10 weeks' time.

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TELEVISION

Is Now Here!

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H. C. LEWIS, President
Radio Division, Coyne Electrical School
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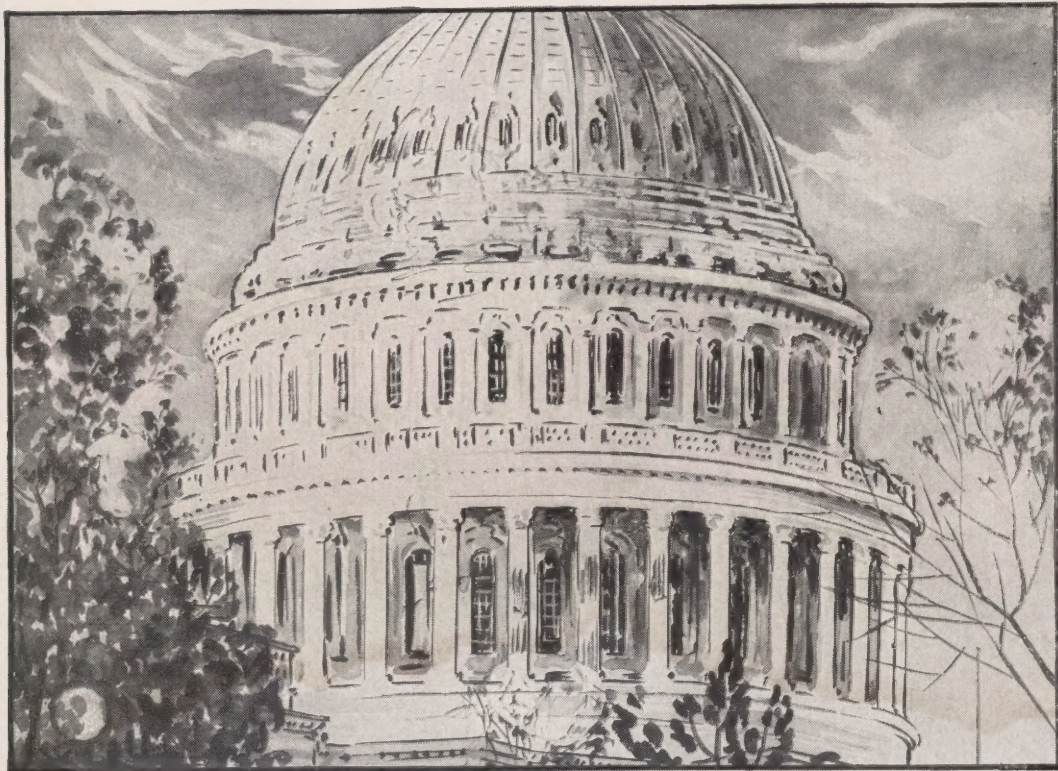
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you can win is \$495.00 and the largest \$3,600.00. On simple evidence of promptness, the first prize winner will receive \$2,000.00 cash as an extra reward just for being quick! Think of that. Now look sharp! Can you see at least three visions of the hidden presidents? If your eyes are clever enough to find three or more of them, cut out only the faces and send to me with your name and address. Someone who has sharp, clever eyes to qualify and is quick, can win three thousand six hundred dollars. It might as well be you. If you pass this test, are quick and make the prize winning standing, this offer will bring you a prize of three thousand six hundred dollars in cash. Duplicate prizes will be paid in case of ties. Answers can be accepted only from persons living in the U. S. A. outside of Chicago.

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